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THE TWIN TRAILERS;

OR,

THE GAMECOCK OF EL PASO.

A TALE OF THE TEXAN FRONTIER.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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THE TWIN TRAILERS.

THE GAMEBOOK OF EL PASO

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THE TWIN TRAILERS.

CHAPTER I

A LONG CHASE.

"Hot, Andrew? Yes; it is warm, but I am not much troubled with the heat."

"I've heern tell of ice-bugs, and you must be one of 'em, ef thar are any sech things. Fur my part, I'm free to confess that I'm roastin', br'ilin' and fryin', all to onc't."

"If you shouldn't touch your lips to your flask of aguardiente quite so often, perhaps you would be cooler. You have taken three or four swigs during the past half-hour."

"Timin' me, are you, Bruce? Drink light but often—that's my rule fur keepin' healthy."

"If a man must drink, he had better drink light. Very light and very seldom would be a better rule than yours. Can a man take fire into his veins and not be hot?"

"It's a burnin' and sizzlin' sort o' liquor, this aguardiente of El Paso, and that's a fact, and it's apt to be heatin'. You're right about that, I reckon; but the strength of it is what I like."

"The strength of it is the very thing that I don't like, Andrew. I don't believe in putting any thing into my mouth that is too strong for my brain. Without my brain I am no man, and your aguardiente will whip the best brain that was ever made."

"That's p'intedly so, Bruce, ef a man takes too much of it; but he must know when and how to use it. You've been out with me many a time. Did you ever know me to flicker in a fight, or to act as ef my head was upsot?"

"I never did, Andrew; but you must remember that when we have been together we have been far away from the settlements, out of reach of aguardiente and all its evils. We

are near the settlements now, and I think, from the way you have begun, that the aguardiente may stand a chance to run away with your brains. We will need all our senses, especially when we are in the settlements, as these Mexicans are even more cunning and treacherous than the Apaches."

"It seems that you are allus bound to be right, Bruce, and I give in. Hyar goes the flask, and that's the last of the aguardiente, at least until we are through with this business."

As the stone flask, hurled by a strong arm, struck upon the hard sand, and broke into fragments, Bruce looked at his companion with an approving smile.

"I am glad to see that," he said, "for my sake, as well as for your own. We had better stop here in the shade, Andrew, and rest our horses."

"Stop here? You can't ketch those folks by stoppin'."

"I have already given that up."

While they are attending to their horses and eating a lunch, we will briefly sketch these two.

He who was called Bruce was a young man of twenty-five or six, by name Bruce Wardner, and by occupation a rancho or stock farmer in Texas. This employment he varied by hunting, a pursuit of which he was passionately fond, and the game that he hunted was often two-legged and red-skinned, as the Indians lost no opportunity of annoying the frontier settlements.

In appearance he was a fine-looking young fellow, with dark-brown hair and clear hazel eyes, and with a frame built rather for activity and suppleness than for great strength. His dress was a mixture of the styles of eastern Texas and Mexico, including a serviceable short blue coat, black velvet calzoveros, a broad-brimmed felt hat, and boots that reached to his knees.

His companion was Andrew Crow, aged thirty, by birth a Texan, and by choice a hunter and Indian-fighter. He could boast of no beauty; but there could be no doubt that he was strong of limb and fleet of foot, and that every sense had been trained to do good service in the pursuits he loved. His garments were of coarse blue homespun, without the least ornament to redeem their ugliness. His sallow, sunburnt face was in no wise improved by a few straggling patches of

sandy hair, similar in color to the unshorn locks that peeped out from under his worn and dirty slouch hat.

Both these men were mounted on wiry mustangs, with Mexican saddles, and with a lariat at each saddle-bow. Both, also, were well armed, with rifles, revolving pistols, and knives.

They had stopped to rest in the shade of a grove of lofty cottonwoods. Before them lay the Del Norte, its muddy waters so low that the stream was easily fordable. Behind them and on each side stretched a rich alluvial bottom, covered with a heavy growth of cottonwood, dwarf oak and mesquit, with abundant underbrush. Rich as the valley was, promising a good reward to the labors of settlers, it was almost uninhabited, as it was subject to the inroads of the Apaches of the north, who continued to maintain a reign of terror among the Mexicans.

When the two men had finished their lunch, Bruce Warner did not yet seem in any hurry to move, but suffered the horses to graze at their leisure.

"I don't understand this," said Andrew. "You war in a big hurry a while ago, but now you take things easy enough."

"My hurry is over," replied Bruce. "I hoped to overtake them before they could reach a stopping-place; but they have had good horses, no doubt, and they must have pushed them hard."

"I wish you would let me into the secret of the thing. I could git along better, I reckon, by knowing what's afore me, than by goin' it blind."

"I meant to tell you; but we have had no time to talk until now. You have known Mrs. Ribero as long as I have, and you have always believed her to be a widow; but you were mistaken. Her husband is a Mexican of good family, and a proud, bigoted man. She married him when she was a mere girl, contrary to the wishes of her relatives and friends in Texas, who said that he would want to educate their children, if they should have any, in Mexico, and with Mexican ideas and prejudices; but Ribero promised that he would do what was right in the matter, and she said that she would do what was right, and they were married.

"You know, Andrew, that people's ideas of what is right differ pretty widely, sometimes."

"Should think they do. 'Minds me of a 'trader, who promised to give me what was right for a season's trappin', onc't. When he'd got rid of the pelts, he 'lowed that fifty dollars would be right, and I 'lowed that five hundred would be nearer the mark. As he wouldn't pay me but fifty, I 'lowed it would be right to give him a thrashin'; but he didn't rally agree with me on that p'int, not even when I'd got done thrashin' him."

"There was as much difference between Mrs. Ribero and her husband, on the point of right, as there was between you and the trader. Julia was their only child, and he was resolved that she should be educated in Mexico, and should finally marry a Mexican whom he had picked out for her, while his wife was equally determined that she should be sent to the States, where she should be entirely free from Mexican control and influence. There was a question of property involved in the matter, you see, Señor Ribero's estate being hopelessly in debt, while his wife had large landed interests in Texas and elsewhere, which he wished to get possession of by means of their daughter.

"Señor Ribero had it all his own way at their home near Durango, and Julia was placed in a convent school, where her mother was hardly permitted even to see her. You know that lady well enough, Andrew, to be sure that she would not long submit to such a state of affairs, if there was any chance to change it.

"Having succeeded at last in stealing Julia away from the convent school, she fled into Texas, where some of her relations lived, and where the greater part of her property is situated. That property and the child are objects of great interest to Señor Ribero and his friends, and they have been trying many stratagems, during the past few years, to get possession of both. As they were afraid to persecute Mrs. Ribero openly in Texas, all their efforts have been made in an underhand way.

"Mrs. Ribero had foiled them several times, had heard nothing of them in a long while, and had begun to believe that they had concluded to trouble her no further. Con-

quently she had become rather careless, and just then the blow fell.

"I don't know yet how it happened. Two or three Mexicans and a strange Irishman had been noticed prowling about the place, though none of the family had seen them. Julia had been missing several hours before it was known what had become of her, and then it could only be guessed at, as a negro boy said that he had seen her riding toward the west, accompanied by two men. Her mother at once knew that Señor Ribero was concerned in the matter."

"Is that a sure thing, Bruce? P'r'aps, now, she mought hev run off to git married to somebody."

"If she had gone off in my company, your guess might have been worth something; but then it would not have been necessary to run away."

"Didn't know you war that lucky, Bruce. Ef that's the case, this Crow will hang on with you 's long 's he's got a feather."

"I count on you, of course. The negro boy's statement had just been made known when I reached Mrs. Ribero's ranch, and I at once questioned him about the appearance of the two men. One of them, I had no doubt, was Padre Ignatius, who had once been a priest in Mexico, but had been deprived of his office by his superiors, on account of ill-conduct. His title clung to him, although he had ceased to deserve it, and he was a fitting tool for the purposes of Señor Ribero, who had already used him in his intrigues to get possession of Julia. That was enough for me, of course; and I had no need of the entreaties of Julia's mother to tell me what to do. I mounted my best horse, and had good luck in stopping to pick you up, and followed the trail, and here we are."

"Jest so. Hyar we are, and I want to know why we're hyar? Why ain't we a few miles further ahead?"

"Andrew, do you know of any thing that will pass muster as a house, between here and El Paso?"

"On'y one."

"And that is—"

"Old Carovar's rancho."

"Precisely. It's a strange thing, isn't it, that old fellow

can stay here unharmed, in a region where the Apaches will permit no other white man to live?"

"He ain't white."

"Yellow, then. But no other Mexican can live there. What would you naturally conclude from that state of affairs?"

"That the old man is in with the reds."

"Just so; and he is not the only New Mexican who is in with them. If they don't really join the Apaches, they disguise themselves as Indians, and make raids on their friends over the river. Don't you believe that?"

"I know it, Bruce."

"It is true, without doubt. Old Carovar is connected with Señor Ribero, too. He is ready to do any mean thing which that party may ask him to do. Those people who were with Julia knew, just when they got through the Jornada, that we were after them."

"It's a big thing, Bruce."

"What is?"

"They've done a big thing, to git holt of that gal, and bring her 'way off hyar, without givin' her a chance to git away, and without comin' foul of any folks who would take her from 'em."

"It is a big thing, as you say. They have played their cards well, and we must work very carefully to get even with them. As I was saying, they know we are after them, and they must have known that we would be likely to overtake them before they could reach El Paso. It is my belief that they have stopped at old Carovar's. Julia would hardly be able to go any further, as it has been a terrible ride for her and they have other reasons for stopping. I think they will pass the night there, and we will go there to look for them."

"Ef they're thar Bruce, we won't be allowed to see 'em."

"Then we will ask Carovar what has become of them."

"Suppose the old 'coon lies to us?"

"He is sure to do that; but we are not bound to believe him. And yet, we must not let him know that we doubt what he tells us."

"I don't know what you've got into your head, Bruce; but I reckon it's all right. You lead on, and I'll foller, and you'll find me as innocent as a young owl."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE HACIENDA.

AN hour's riding brought Bruce Wardner and his friend within sight of the rancho or hacienda of Señor Carovar—the remainder of whose many names we will not weary the reader by recording. It was situated on a tabular bluff near the river, and presented the appearance of a fortress, a square space being inclosed by a thick and high adobe wall, with bastions at the four corners. Within the inclosure were a few dwellings of peons, and other small buildings, near the gate.

Opposite the gate, and occupying the whole of the rear end, was the house of the proprietor, a long and low building, also formed of adobes, with a flat roof, and with a parapet at the rear.

The sun was yet two hours high when the Americans approached the rancho, and they knew that they had been perceived, as a sentry on one of the bastions turned to communicate with those below, and stir and excitement were visible about the building.

Nevertheless, when they knocked at the gate, and kicked, and called at the top of their voices, it was a long time before a Mexican showed his head at the top of the wall, and asked them who they were and what they wanted.

When they had answered these questions, by saying that they were strangers, Americans, who desired to rest and to see the proprietor, there was another long pause, at the close of which the gate was slowly opened, and they were admitted, with their horses, within the hallowed inclosure, sacred to dirt and fleas and tawdry grandeur.

No sooner were they inside than the gate was closed and locked, and at once the eyes and ears of the two Americans

were wide open. Nothing was visible that they did not see; no word or other sound was audible, that they did not hear. Bruce noticed a fine, blooded horse, which he believed to have been stolen. He noticed several articles of Mexican manufacture lying about the yard, and doubted whether they had come honestly into the possession of Señor Carovar. He saw the dirty huts of the peons, the stacks of corn-husks, the well in the center, the cramped and inconvenient stables. Everything that was to be seen he saw; but he saw nothing of the party that he had been following for so many weary miles, because they were not visible. He saw nothing of their horses, or any thing that he could have supposed to belong to them; but he had seen tracks leading to the gate, and he believed that they were the same tracks with which he had had occasion to get well acquainted during the course of a long and arduous trail.

When he and Andrew drew near to the house, they had a different reception from that which they had experienced at the gate. The proprietor of the rancho came forward to meet them, and assured them that his house, with every thing it contained, including himself, was at their service.

Señor Carovar, although Andrew had called him "Old Carovar," was not an old man in appearance. He did not have the lean, sallow, smoke-dried look peculiar to his race, nor was his aspect either malevolent or treacherous. On the contrary, he was fat, oily and smiling, with greasy black hair, and little, unctuous eyes, set close to his flat, purple nose. Peace, good-will and blessing seemed to ooze from the pores of his flat face, and to drip, like healing ointment, from his pudgy hands. Nor was he dressed after the manner of Mexican caballeros or hidalgos, but was plainly attired in black broadcloth, which would have been quite neat and respectable if it had been clean.

"He looks like a priest in disguise," thought Bruce, and Andrew "allowed" that he was a padre who had been "spoilt in the makin'," and had been turned adrift by the church for the church's own good.

From the abundance that he offered them, Bruce replied, in good Spanish, that they would only choose a little food for their horses, a brief rest for themselves, and the privilege of

chatting in the mean while with the respected proprietor of the rancho.

"Help yourselves to whatever you wish," replied Carovar. "I am always glad to see my friends, the Americans of the North, and every thing I have is at their service. I was a little suspicious at first, fearing that you might be Indians; but it gives me great pleasure to serve my friends, the Americans."

Bruce thought that he and his companion looked as little like Indians as any white men could; but he did not dispute the assertion of his host, and asked if he had any *notedades*—news of the Indians.

"Ah, these Indians!" exclaimed Señor Carovar. "They are terrible fellows, and we are always in fear of them. We have not seen any lately, but have heard that they are in the valley. We are obliged to keep watch day and night, as they may come at any moment."

"We saw some sign of Indians, as we thought, a little way up the valley," replied Bruce. "There were some friends of ours ahead of us, and we have been anxious about them."

"Of what friends are you speaking?"

"Two men and a young lady. We were anxious to overtake them, believing that it would be safer for them to travel in our company; but they have doubtless stopped in here, and are now enjoying the hospitalities of your hacienda."

"Holy Virgin! What a pity! Were they your friends? They said nothing of any friends who were following them. I begged, I implored them to stop here, that they might rest and keep clear of those terrible Indians; but they had not one moment to spare; they must hasten on to El Paso. And they were your friends? What a pity! What a pity!"

"And did they go on to El Paso, señor?"

"Certainly. Without a stop. My entreaties were in vain. They could hardly turn, even to look at the hacienda."

"I noticed the tracks of three horses, leading in at the gate, and I thought that my friends had surely come here."

"Truly, señor, these are the tracks of the horses of my *mazos*, who returned from the maize-field."

Bruce had not seen any maize-field in the vicinity, and was sure that the tracks were the same which he had been follow

ing ; but he could not think of doubting the word of Señor Carovar.

"It is very unfortunate," he said. "We shall be compelled to continue our journey, hoping to overtake them before they reach the river. How long is it, señor, since they passed the hacienda?"

"Santissima madre! It is two hours, señor—fully two hours. What a pity! And they were your friends! If they had known that you were coming, they would surely have stopped here. But you must not go on, señor. Remain and partake of my poor hospitality. You could hardly overtake them now, and you need rest for yourselves and your beasts."

Andrew had been feeding the horses, and had attended so well to their wants, that they were ready to start.

Perceiving that the Americans were bent upon going, the Mexican renewed his importunities. When the horses were saddled, he became more pressing than ever, and Bruce hesitated a moment, as if irresolute what to do. But his hesitation was at an end when he noticed that Carovar ceased his importunities at the same moment, and he protested that he must make haste to continue his journey.

Before mounting, he offered his host pay for the feed of the horses, well knowing the value of Mexican hospitality. There could be no doubt that Carovar was eager to accept the coin. He could control the muscles of his fingers, but could not control the expression of his countenance. But he obstinately refused to receive pay, and would not allow Bruce to press it upon him.

Bruce then mounted and rode away, after bidding his host adieu most cordially. Andrew, who had worn during the interview as stupid an expression as could possibly exist upon the countenance of a live American, was overcome by the warmth of his feelings—so much so that he was obliged to press the hand of Señor Carovar at parting, giving him a grip that brought the tears into his eyes, and caused him to lift his feet in a distant approach to a pigeon-wing.

The scene in the court-yard had been witnessed from the inside of the hacienda.

In one of the low, dark, scantily-furnished rooms of the

building was a young lady of seventeen, who would have been regarded in a northern climate as at least two years older. Her dark hair and brunette complexion spoke of the sunny skies beneath which she had been born and reared. Her pale cheeks, her air of extreme weariness, and her eyes that still bore the traces of tears, told of the anguish of body and mind that she had endured in the course of a long and painful journey. But her sufferings had not been sufficient to tarnish theuster of her great beauty, or to subdue the courageous spirit that looked out of her dark eyes.

There were two men with her in the dim room. One was an evil-eyed, yellow-skinned Mexican, short, broad shouldered and coarsely-clad. The other was tall and thin, of mild and gentlemanly appearance, dressed in a full suit of broadcloth, cut in the American style.

Julia Ribero, as well as her two companions, had noticed the commotion about the hacienda, and knew that strangers had arrived. There was a slit in the adobe wall, that might by courtesy have been called a window, through which a few rays of light found their way into the apartment. Ending the vigilance of her attendants, she reached the window, and looked out into the yard.

As she caught sight of Bruce Wardner, she attempted to call for help; but her exhaustion was such that her first cry was faint and hardly audible. Before she could make another effort, the hand of the tall man was placed over her mouth, and she was forcibly seized by his companion.

"What shall I do, father Ignatius?" asked the short Mexican.

"Take her away, Ramon. Lead her to the corner, and keep her quiet. If she attempts to make any more noise, she must be gagged."

Julia submitted to being drawn away from the window, and seated herself in a corner of the room. She did not burst into tears, nor did she exhibit any signs of anger at this treatment, or of resignation to her fate. Cool and calm determination was written in every line of her features, as she looked up at the ex priest.

"Are you not inclined to be cruel, father Ignatius?" she asked.

"Cruel? Oh, no! It is for your good, my child—entirely for your good."

"Do you suppose that you can do with me as you please?"

"We will try to do with you as we ought to."

"I give you fair warning that I will oppose your purpose with every means in my power."

"I will hope, my child, that when you are restored to the arms of your father, and to your true friends, this rebellious spirit may give place to softer and better feelings."

"If it gives place to any other feeling, you may be sure that my mind is no longer my own. I have no friends in Mexico, and in spite of you I will yet return to my mother."

"And to that young Texan, out yonder?"

"Yes; and to him! I love him, and am not ashamed to own it."

"Let us talk no more upon this subject, my child. You need rest, and you should not excite yourself."

When Julia had been compelled to vacate the window, her place was taken by the ex-padre, who kept his eye at the slip until Bruce and Andrew had left the place, and the gate was fastened behind them.

Then he hastened out to meet Señor Carovar, who was returning to the house, holding his right hand in his left, and looking at it ruefully, as if doubting whether Andrew Crow's squeeze had really left him a hand.

"They are gone, father Ignatius," said Carovar. "I attended to them well. Did you hear how neatly I lied to them?"

"Do they not suspect that we are here?"

"How can they? They have gone on toward El Paso a gallop. I flatter myself that I pulled the wool over their eyes nicely."

"I hope you have; but that young Texan has brains and energy. He is not an adversary that we can trifle with."

"Nor is he a man who can trifle with Maximo Carovar. I took his measure, mi padre, and knew what to say to him. The wool is nicely pulled over his eyes."

"I was almost wishing, at one time, that you might persuade them to remain until morning."

"And why?"

"We could so easily have got rid of them to-night."

"What you say is true, mi padre; but I had not thought it necessary to go to *such* a length."

"It is best that they went on, no doubt; but I fear that that young man may yet give us trouble. Are you sure that they went straight to El Paso?"

"Why not? They went off at a gallop. As far as the could be seen they were still going. Let us step in and get some refreshment."

CHAPTER III.

TAKING THE BACK TRACK.

If Señor Carovar could have watched the two Americans, as they rode down the river, without being seen by them, he would have doubted whether he had succeeded in pulling the wool over their eyes.

As he said, they had rode off at a gallop; but, when they had turned a bend in the road, where the heavy timber shut off the sight of the rancho, they reined in their horses and brought them down to a walk.

"The old coon lied to us, Bruce," remarked Andrew.

"Just as we expected. We were pretty certain not to be disappointed in that particular."

"Was you disapp'inted in any partic'lar?"

"In none at all. Julia and the two Mexicans were at the rancho."

"Yaas; the tracks of the hosses war plain enough. No body could help seein' that."

"I saw more than that, Andrew. I saw a white hand thrust out of one of those villainous slits in the building that they call windows. It was only for a moment that I saw it, as it was immediately withdrawn; but I knew the hand."

"The gal's hand, was it? You must hev bin watchin' around tol'able sharp, and your eyes are as keen as a hawk's. I'r afe I mought hev seen it too, ef I hadn't been lookin' at-

ter the hosses. Did you hev any notion at all of stoppin' thar?"

"At one time I did. It was a great temptation; but I did not yield to it. We could have done no good there, and those Mexicans would have had a fine opportunity to slit our throats."

"They're purty sartin to go fur all those chances, too."

"I believe that they would have been sure to kill us, in one way or another, if we had attempted to pass the night there. As it is, we know just what we wanted to know, and old Carovar believes, no doubt, that we swallowed his lies as gospel."

"What next? Ef they believe that we've gone on to Paso, that'll be the very place they won't take the gal to."

"Very likely. They will wait, at least, until we get out of the way. Just now we are gaining time, and that is a great point. If they once get her to El Paso, among their friends, we might as well give up the ship. We are in the enemy's country now, and must be very careful how we act. You and I could do nothing at old Carovar's rancho, nor could we do much outside of there, unless those Mexicans should happen to travel without a party, which they are not likely to do. We will have friends to help us before long, I hope, and every hour that Julia is kept on this side of the river will be a gain to us. The thing to be done just now is to keep watch of the Mexicans, and to know what becomes of Julia if they remove her from the rancho."

"Jest so. Shall we go back and lay around the rancho, to keep watch on 'em?"

"I will go back, Andrew, if you will allow me to go alone. I propose to stop at that tall cottonwood yonder, and there I will take leave of you."

"And what will I do?"

"You will go on to El Paso, I hope, and you will find my brother Wallace there."

"What is Wallace doin' thar?"

"That is more than I can tell you; but I believe him to be there, and it will be lucky for us if he is there. Tell him what has happened, and tell him all about it."

"What then?"

"Then I must leave you and Wallace to decide what is best to be done. I can give no further directions. Here is the cottonwood, Andrew, and I must go into the timber to hide my horse. Good-by, old boy, and take care of your self."

"That's jest what I want you to do, Bruce. As things are fixed up, your part of the job is powerful ticklish, and I'm afeard you may git into trouble."

"I shall look out for myself as well as I can, and you may tell Wallace that I am doing just exactly what I believe to be right. There! Don't give me such a squeeze as you gave old Carovar."

"Ha! ha! ha! Wal, it's better to part a-laughin' than a-cryin'. Good-by, Bruce."

Andrew rode off at a smart pace, and Bruce Wardner guided his horse into the timber, but presently came out, as if he had reconsidered his purpose, and retraced his steps up the road half a mile or so.

Having found a place where he believed his horse would be safe from any casual notice, he hopped the animal and left him to graze, knowing that he would not be likely to stray. Then he shaped his course for the rancho, walking in the road, but keeping a good look-out, both in front and rear.

It was nearly dusk when he parted from Andrew, and night came on rapidly. When he came in sight of the hacienda, it was so dark that he could see nothing of that establishment but a dark mass on the bluff, that might easily be mistaken for the ruins of some ancient castle.

He examined his rifle and pistols, loosened his knife in its sheath, and clambered up the bluff, taking care to keep out of the range of vision of any sentry who might be stationed at either corner of the wall, though the darkness was such that he did not really fear that he might be seen.

When he had reached the wall he kept close under it, for the sake of avoiding observation, and carefully walked around, feeling the adobes, and using his eyesight as well as he could, endeavoring to discover some opening in the wall, or break or projections by which he might climb up.

He found nothing of the kind. The adobes were smooth

and sound, and the wall was in good repair. But he found a sentry at the south-west bastion, of whose presence he was admonished by a stone that was dropped unpleasantly near him. Then a lantern was held out at the top of the wall, but the spy lay so close in the shadow that he was not perceived.

After making sure that he had not been discovered, he stole around the corner, and kept on until he reached the rear wall, against which the house was built. He came to the conclusion that he must climb the wall, if at any place, near the front of the house, as there he would have the best opportunity of seeing what was going on in the yard, if there should be any thing at all to be seen.

He had brought a lariat for this purpose; but it was not an easy thing to use it effectually, and he lay still and listened for several minutes before making an effort.

Hearing nothing, he adjusted the ring, and tossed the end of the rope lightly over the wall, drawing it back carefully, in the hope that it might catch on some projection.

After several trials, at different points, he met with success. The noose caught, and he drew it tight. He swung upon it, to make sure that it would bear his weight, listened again, and began the ascent.

He reached the top of the wall with but little effort, swung one leg over, crouched down, and looked and listened.

He neither saw nor heard any thing that specially interested him. The sentry on the south-west bastion was still at his post, with his "lantern dimly burning" just inside the wall. He heard the stamping of mules and horses, the nightly noises of poultry, and even the squeaking of vagrant rats; but he saw and heard scarcely any thing else. Above him was night, starless, cloudy, black and heavy; about him the dim outline of the wall and the dark mass of the dwelling-house. All was so quiet, that he could not doubt that the inmates of the hacienda were all sleeping the sleep of the just, or some other sleep, without fear or thought of vengeful Texans, marauding Apaches, or prowling enemies of any description, confiding in the wakefulness and discretion of the lazy and stupid sentry on the south-west bastion.

Satisfied with what he had seen, if not pleased, Bruce Wardner quietly descended the wall on the outside, shook loose his lariat, and coiled it for future use.

He was very, very sleepy. Fatigued by his long ride and by loss of sleep, he sorely felt the need of rest. As long as there was any thing to be done, the necessity of the case had kept his faculties aroused and on the alert; but now, when there was no call upon him for exertion of mind or body, he felt that he might yield to the lassitude that crept over him. Habit had given him the ability to wake at any hour on which he should fix his mind, and he determined that he would leave his resting-place just before dawn, and would seek some place of concealment from which he could observe all who should enter or leave the hacienda.

He laid down on the ground, close to the wall, and was asleep in an instant. There was no wooing of the sleep-god, no toying or trifling with slow-coming rest, no thought of the arduous duty before him, or even of the perils and sufferings of Julia Ribero. Sleep fell upon him like an avalanche, crushing him at once into oblivion.

He was awakened by a confusion of noises, that became louder and more definite as his senses were more fully aroused. There was a strange commotion within the wall, where oaths and exclamations in sonorous Spanish were mingled with savage yells, startlingly like those which the young hunter had often heard proceeding from the throats of red-skinned warriors.

Had the rancho been attacked and captured by Apaches? If so, the surprise had been sudden and complete, in spite of the vigilance of the redoubtable warrior on the south-west bastion. There seemed to be hardly noise and confusion and terror enough for an Indian attack; but Bruce did not have time to debate the question.

There was a scream, such a scream as sudden terror will bring to the lips of the bravest woman, and Bruce knew that the cry was uttered by Julia Ribero.

He snatched his rifle, and hastened around the wall to the gate. It was open, and he eagerly looked in.

He saw a number of mounted men in the court-yard, half-naked and wild-looking. What could they be but Apaches?

But the peons and other inmates of the hacienda were mingled with them, and lights were moving about the yard, and there was no appearance of the massacre and consternation that should accompany an Indian foray. What could it mean?

Suddenly a number of mounted men wheeled their horses, and dashed out at the gate.

Bruce shrunk into the corner, and wedged himself between the gate and the pillar that supported it. He could neither retreat nor go forward.

There was a light step behind him. As he half rose and turned to meet it, something struck him a dull, crushing blow on the back of the head, and he sunk to the ground insensible.

CHAPTER IV.

A BROTHER AND A RIVAL.

ANY one who had been made acquainted with the temperance principles of Bruce Wardner would have been surprised to see him seated at a table in a meson of El Paso, with a bottle of wine before him. Andrew Crow, if he had there met his friend and lecturer, would have been tempted to advise him to put in practice the precepts which he was so well able to impress upon others.

But Andrew Crow would have quickly perceived that this gentleman differed somewhat in appearance from the Bruce Wardner with whom he was so well acquainted, and would have looked at him more closely before speaking to him. Another glance would have convinced him that it was not Bruce Wardner who was seated at the table, but a person whom a casual acquaintance could not help mistaking for Bruce Wardner.

And so it was. It was Wallace Wardner, the twin brother of Bruce, who was paying his respects to the vintage of El Paso, the product of the fine vineyards of which the Peñoles were so proud.

Wallace Wardner, although the exact counterpart of his brother in form and features, differed from him in some important particulars. In temperament he was wild and dashing, even to recklessness; while Bruce was cool, quiet and cautious. Bruce always dressed plainly, but with scrupulous neatness; while Wallace's attire partook of his romantic nature and his gay, dashing disposition. Bruce, although fond of hunting and of perilous adventures, was content to manage his stock-farm with an eye to profit; but Wallace could be fettered by no such restraints, and heartily despised all the conventionalities of society.

The twin brothers were so much alike, that each had often been mistaken for the other in Texas, even by those who were best acquainted with them. This state of affairs was occasionally annoying to both. It became so unpleasant to Wallace, that he determined to separate from his brother and leave the neighborhood.

This was the ostensible cause of his going; but the chief reason lay in the fact that he wanted a wider range, less society and more adventure, a freer and wilder life. He had betaken himself to the wilderness, where he found these requirements, and where he was supposed to be devoted to explorations of unknown regions, mingled with hunting and Indian warfare.

He made occasional descents upon the settlements, and kept up an irregular communication with his brother, to whom he was warmly attached. It was because of a message received from him that Bruce had told Andrew Crow that he would be likely to meet Wallace in El Paso.

The establishment that we have called a meson was not properly an inn, being a mixture of coffee-house and wine-shop, and was frequented by the "better class" of the village and neighborhood of El Paso. Among its frequenters there was no more noticeable figure than that of Wallace Wardner.

His dress, of itself, was calculated to attract attention, the principal item being a hunting-shirt of dressed deer-skin, the material being wonderfully soft and pliable. This garment, together with its ample cape, was embroidered fancifully and tastefully, in a barbaric but most beautiful manner, show-

ing that months of labor had been expended upon it, probably by some skillful and patient Moqui or Navajo squaw. The buttons were of gold coins, and the fringes of green silk, except the fringe of the cape, which was composed of bits of bone, carved in shapes of arrows and daggers. The garment was confined at the waist by a crimson silk sash, but was open at the breast, displaying a white linen shirt of "the period."

The hunter was further clothed and adorned with black velvet calzoneros of Mexico, duly slashed from the hip down and ornamented with silver buttons; also with high boots of untanned leather; also with a dark felt hat looped up on one side, showing an eagle's feather at the loop. His dark brown hair fell in wavy masses about his shoulders, and his untrimmed beard accorded well with the cast of his features. To this description it should be added that Wallace Wardner spoke Spanish perfectly, and might easily be mistaken for a Mexican when, as he would have said, he chose to act like a Mexican.

At the same table was seated another young man, who was dressed, but not gaudily, in the Mexican fashion. Augustin Ruiz was a young gentleman of Durango, of good birth and education, blessed with a fair amount of wealth and polished manners. Wallace had soon come to the conclusion that his companion was lacking only in one thing—sense. Augustin, for his part, had a glimmering perception of the same deficiency.

Wallace, however, treated his new acquaintance with the greatest cordiality and politeness, good-humoredly deferring to his opinions, and listening very patiently to the story that he was so long in telling.

"And so," said Wallace, as he filled his glass, "this girl whom they wish you to marry is living in Texas? It is not at all probable that I have ever seen her, as I don't pretend to any acquaintance in Texas. The case is not such a very singular one, though, as I have heard of others of the same nature, and a similar affair has come within my personal knowledge. What is the name of the young lady?"

"Julia Ribero."

Wallace Wardner did not start or change color, though

There was a slight twitching of the muscles of his face. He had thought it possible that the story the Mexican had been telling might be connected with some persons whose acquaintance he had formed in Texas, and he was not surprised at the mention of the name of Julia Ribero.

He passed the bottle to Raiz, and pressed it upon his notice. The Mexican drank freely; but Wallace contented himself with making circles on the table with the wet foot of his wine glass.

"She is beautiful, of course," he said; "but, Don Augustin, do you love her?"

"How should I know, when I have never seen her?"

"This is an arrangement, then, between her father and your parents, and you have had no voice in the matter?"

"As yet I have had none."

"Do you think it probable that you will have a voice in the matter?"

"If she is so beautiful and amiable as she has been described to me, I shall take great pleasure in making her my wife."

"I understand. If she suits you, you will gladly consent, if she does not suit you, your consent will be unwillingly given. Don't spare the wine, Don Augustin. It is harmless, the vintage of El Paso, and it is really a very fair wine. I sympathize with you, my friend, and I drink to your good health and great success. Is there no one else who has anything to say in the matter, besides these excellent elderly people?"

"Who else should have?"

"It is possible that the young lady may be interested in the affair. Has she any property?"

"She will be entitled to a considerable estate when she comes of age."

"Perhaps her father would like to own an interest in that estate?"

"He will have an interest in it, I suppose."

"No doubt of that. Do you remember the fable of the monkey which persuaded the cat to pull his chestnuts out of the fire?"

"It has no application to this case."

"We will let it pass, then. But you must not let the bottle pass you, señor. This is a cheerful wine, not heady, and talking is such dry work. As I understand you, the young lady will soon be of age by American law, and her father wishes to get control of her before she becomes her own mistress. It is to his interest to do so, if he desires to dispose of her hand and her property. Have you ever thought, Don Augustin, that she may have given her heart to some young Texan?"

The Mexican frowned and bit his lip. That view of the case was by no means pleasing to him.

"I have thought of that," he said, "and it is possible, no doubt; but she surely has no right to dispose of her hand."

"Not in Mexico, it is true; but they manage those things differently in the United States. The wine is with you, señor. Fill your glass and pass me the bottle. I was simply remarking, Don Augustin, that she might already have disposed of her heart. In that case, it would be an insult to you to suppose that you would lay claim to her hand. The Mexican people are too high minded and chivalrous to force the inclinations of young ladies. There are some, it is true, in all countries, who are base enough for any thing; but the *sangre azul* that flows in your veins, and the truth and honor that I see beaming from your face, would forbid my casting such an imputation upon you."

Wallace thought that he had been "spreading it on pretty thick," and that he had better drain his glass, for the double purpose of wetting his whistle and hiding a smile.

"Has she really formed such an attachment?" asked Ruiz, looking perplexed and flattered.

"How should I know? I was merely supposing a case."

"True. This wine of El Paso must have got into my head, as I am bewildered."

"It is nothing. Your head is too clear and strong to be affected so easily. Do you not know, señor, that you would not think of claiming her hand, if her heart had been given to another?"

"I must hope that she still has a heart to dispose of. I believe that she would love me after marriage, if not before. I flatter myself—"

"Yes, Don Augustin; we all flatter ourselves too much in this life. You flatter yourself, I hope, that you are an honorable man."

"You must be aware, señor, that if your supposition should be correct, it would make no difference with her father's plans or intentions."

"I suppose not; but with you, Don Augustin, it would make a great difference."

The Mexican was silent. He fidgeted uneasily in his chair and poured out another glass of wine, Wallace Wardner watching him as a hawk might watch a chicken. At last he swallowed his wine, and rose to leave, as the easiest way of putting an end to the discussion.

"Where is my mozo?" he asked. "It is getting late, and I must go to my lodgings. That lazy fellow is never at hand when he is wanted."

"I will find him in a moment, my friend. Permit me to ask you one more question, as you may need my assistance in this matter, and as I am always happy to lend my services to a man of honor. You say that a padre has gone into Texas, with sufficient help, to get possession of the young lady by some stratagem, and to bring her to Mexico. When do you expect them to arrive?"

"If the padre has succeeded in his mission, he should soon be here."

"Will he come direct to El Paso?"

"That was his intention. It is for the purpose of meeting him that I am here with Señor Ribero. We expect him every day."

Wallace bowed, and stepped out into the street, returning with a Mexican servant lad, who gave his arm to his master as the wine of El Paso had made Don Augustin dizzy, and his gait was somewhat unsteady.

"Take good care of him, Angel," said the American. "I think, my friend, that you had better walk around the plaza before going to your lodgings. Adios; or, rather, hasta mañana."

When the Mexicans had left the house, Wallace again seated himself at the table, and made more circles on the wood with the wet foot of his wine-glass. There was a frown

on his brow, as he communed with himself, and his thoughts took this shape :

"I am afraid somebody is going to get hurt before this business is settled. That Mexican is a clever little fellow, *for* a Mexican ; but he has the faults of his tribe, and they can't be rubbed out. It is nothing but lack of sense, I do believe, that makes him half-way decent. I gave him a fair chance to come out like a man of honor, like a chivalrous gentleman, and declare against all sorts of underhand trickery and Mexican meanness ; but he didn't take the chance. I coaxed him, and flattered him, and tried to bring him up to the mark. He is led by his parents, and he would marry without a scruple, if he could get her, a woman who could never love him.

"If he had come out plainly and squarely, like a man, and had said that he was being forced into the business, that he didn't believe in that sort of thing as a matter of principle, and that he wouldn't marry the girl unless he could first gain her love, he would have made a friend of me, and I would have stuck to him through thick and thin. But I couldn't bring him to that point. Two bottles of this Paso wine wouldn't warm his heart—because there was no heart to warm. There is a soft place in his head ; but his gizzard is as tough as leather.

"It is likely that he will get hurt. If he goes on with this business, and if I discover that he really stands in Bruce's way, I shall be obliged to call him out and shoot him. I shall be sorry to do it ; but my duty points that way. It is lucky for Bruce that I happen to be here just now.

"It is getting late and the fandango of the arrieros must be under good headway. I must go down and see who is there, as I may need friends, and will want to know where to find them."

The American paid his bill, took his rifle in his hand—a splendid weapon, silver-mounted and highly polished—and left the cafe.

CHAPTER V.

THE FANDANGO.

THE village of El Paso, which boasts a plaza, or public square, is situated at the head of the valley; but a continuous settlement extends some fifteen miles down the river, terminated by the presidio, or fort, of San Eleazario. The space between these two points is filled by straggling adobe houses, to which gardens and vineyards are attached, in a good state of cultivation.

Such, at least, was the appearance of the town and settlement when Wallace Wardner walked down the long street, in search of a *meson* that served as a house of entertainment for *arrieros*, or muleteers.

He found the building at a distance of about half a mile from the plaza. If he had not known its location, he would have been guided to it with certainty by the lights and the noise of the merriment.

It was a large and low adobe house, with a vineyard on the south side, a garden at the west, and a large corral on the north, for the accommodation of the animals belonging to the mule-trains. It was lighted up in every part, and resounded with the music of violins and the laughter of men and women. Occasional oaths and rude exclamations proved that the entertainment was not of the choicest kind.

A mule-train had arrived from Chihuahua, and the muleteers who had made the journey safely and successfully, were giving their friends a fandango, in celebration of the event. Two rooms were lighted up; but the dancing was in the corral, which was crowded with pretty *poblanas* and gay *arrieros*, including a "right smart sprinkle" of wild-looking Americans, mountaineers and teamsters, of whom there were always more or less in town.

Wallace shouldered his way into the corral, and was greeted on all sides by the name of El Gallo—the Gamecock—which had been familiarly bestowed upon him, in place of

his unpronounceable American appellation. An observer would have at once decided him to be a favorite; at least among the fairer portion of the assembly, who could not help admiring his fine form, his fair complexion, and his picturesque attire. It was not to be supposed that the jealous Mexicans would look upon him with favor; but they vented their displeasure in dark looks, and made no objection to his entrance.

In fact, the American gave them no cause for hostility. He did not undertake to join the dance, although repeatedly solicited to do so, and although the beckoning glances of the bright-eyed poblanas were more expressive than any verbal invitation would have been.

He stood apart, leaning against the wall of the corral, searching the crowd through and through with his keen eyes, scarcely vouchsafing any reply to the coquettish remarks that were flung at him by the dancers as they circled near his station.

His silence and abstraction were the cause of no little comment.

"El Gallo means to forsake the world and turn hermit," said one merry poblana, as she darted a wicked glance at him from under the folds of her reboso.

"He is to enter a theater, and is learning to play the part of a Capucino," suggested another.

"He is grieving for his absent Juanita," remarked a third.

Wallace started at this remark, and his face flushed.

"What do you know of Juanita?" he asked, quickly.

"Where is she? What has become of her?"

"Ask her of Maximo Carovar!" said a whispering voice in his ear.

Wallace turned like lightning; but the speaker was already lost in the crowd. He had caught a glimpse of a dark-skinned woman and a black lace mantilla; but he could not find her, although he hustled his way among the dancers in all directions, his lack of ceremony provoking many a growl and muttered curse.

"Ask the devil!" he said to himself, as he resumed his station at the wall. "It is all the same—the devil and Maximo Carovar—I can't speak of one without thinking of the

other. I have no cause to love that old rascal; but he has been careful to let me alone hitherto. If it is he who has made way with Juanita, he had better never have been born. I must search again for that woman who spoke to me."

He was about to do so, when his attention was attracted by a disturbance within the meson. There was a scuffle, with oaths and exclamations, in which the voice of an American was highest, a voice that seemed familiar to Wallace.

He sprung into the room, and forced his way through the crowd to the scene of excitement.

In a corner of the room, with his back against the wall, was a stout-built American, dressed in blue homespun, confronted by a number of angry Mexicans. The American, flourishing a heavy bowie-knife, kept his antagonists at bay, while he dared them to come on. The Mexicans, who were all vociferating together, had their stilettoes and machetes drawn, ready for combat.

Wallace burst through the throng, and stood by the side of his beleaguered countryman, with his rifle in his hands. With one sweep of this weapon he cleared a space in front of them, and then brought the butt of the rifle down upon the floor, with a thump that silenced the Mexican chattering and commanded attention.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Why are you all attacking one man? What has he done?"

"Notain' at all," growled the American. "I war jest comin' in here, and one of those Greasers pitched onto me for a fight. I knocked him down, and the rest of 'em begun to wale in. It 'u'd take more'n a dozen such cowardly skunks to skeer this child."

The Mexicans seemed disposed to press the matter to blows; but the determined attitude of Wardner and his friend, and the fact that they were being joined by other Americans, rendered them cautious, and they condescended to enter into explanations.

"Is that all?" asked Wallace, when they had said their say. "Because some fool of a pelado mistakes a stranger for one of his old enemies, you must all turn against the stranger. You were too hasty, my friends, and have not acted like noble, free-hearted *arrieros*. I know this man, and can

assure you that the fellow was mistaken. Let us not interrupt the dancers with any more foolish scenes. As for that dog who commenced the disturbance, he ought to be kicked out of the house."

The tide had turned, and the Americans were treated with great courtesy, while the Mexican who had assaulted the stranger was unceremoniously ejected.

Wallace grasped the hand of his friend in blue homespun, whom he had already recognized.

"Where did you come from, Andrew, and what are you doing here?"

"You're the very man I'm huntin'," replied Andrew. "I heerd that thar war gwine to be a fandango, and I 'lowed, ef you war in town, that I'd be mighty apt to find you in this crowd."

"I am right glad to see you, and have some news to tell you."

"I've got news fur you, too—big, bu'stin' news—from Bruce."

"From Bruce?"

"Yes; and it must be 'tended to right straight. Let's go outside."

They left the inn, and walked up the street. As they went, Andrew related all he knew concerning the disappearance of Julia Ribero from her home, and the long chase of Bruce and himself, in pursuit of the man who had carried her away. He concluded by telling of the visit to Carovar's rancho, and of Bruce's return to watch those premises.

Wallace, in his turn, gave the items that he had gleaned during his acquaintance with Augustin Raiz.

"They've been takin' a big round of it," suggested Andrew. "Should think they might have got to Durango by a shorter cut than this."

"Señor Ribero has removed from Durango. They want to take Julia to Sonora, and perhaps they had other reasons for taking a northern route."

"Shouldn't wonder ef they wanted to keep cl'ar of the settlements. Ef they go to Sonora they can't help leavin' openin's fur us on the way."

"If they ever bring her as far as El Paso, Andrew, I

will block one end of the game, if I have to play a bullet."

"Reckon I kin guess what you mean; but it'll be a heap better to keep 'em outside of Mexico. I ain't ashamed to confess that I'm skeered up more'n a little 'bout Bruce. Don't like his stayin' behind, alone so. Thar's 'most too many chances ag'in' him around old Carovar's ranch."

Wallace ground his teeth at the name of Carovar.

"That infernal, two-sided, black-hearted villain!" he exclaimed. "If he injures a hair of Bruce's head, he will have to account for it with his heart's blood. I have hated him for a long time, and have felt sure that I would yet fall foul of him. I believe, now, that I have a real cause of complaint against him. If my suspicions are correct, nothing less than his life can atone for the wrong he has done me. I must tell you the story, Andrew."

"Fire ahead. I've already felt as ef I'd like to plug the old thief, and you kin bet your bottom dollar that I'm with you in anythin' that's ag'in' him."

"I love a Mexican girl, Andrew. Her name is Juanita, and she is an orphan. Her parents were killed by a war-party of Apaches, from whom I rescued her. I brought her here to El Paso, and placed her in charge of a good old lady. In a little while I discovered that I loved her, and that she returned my love. I could not tear myself away from El Paso for many weeks after this discovery. Her bright eyes and endearing ways kept me tied here, and she and I made the round of all the gayeties of this dry-mud village."

"At last I was compelled to go north, to look after a trading-party that I had sent up among the Pimas. We parted, with the understanding that we were to be married on my return. I got through with my business as soon as possible, and hurried back to El Paso."

"Juanita was gone, Andrew. The old lady with whom I had left her was nearly distracted, and could tell me nothing about her. I made inquiries in all directions, but could hear nothing of her. I searched everywhere, but could not find the slightest trace. I am a bloodhound on a trail, as you know: but here there was not the least scent to follow."

"I have been wandering about here, Andrew, during the past three or four days, in a half-crazy condition. I had nearly come to the conclusion that her love for me was a sham, and that she had deserted me for some young Mexican boy, some former lover, perhaps. But I wanted to know. Any thing would be better than uncertainty.

"Wherever men and women were to be found, I have been. Wherever there was a crowd of any kind, I have mixed in it. I have made myself a spy, a sneak, an eavesdropper, but all to no purpose until to-night.

"At the fandango I was casually speaking about her, and some one whispered in my ear, telling me to ask her of Maximino Carovar. I knew that it was a dark-skinned woman who spoke, and that she wore a black lace mantilla; but that is all I know, as she disappeared as soon as she spoke to me. I sought for her, but could not find her, and then your little scrimmage came up. You know as much of the matter now, Andrew, as I do."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"That is more than I can tell you, just yet. I must find out, in some way, whether old Carovar is accountable for Juanita's disappearance. If he is, he and I will have an account to settle. The night is pretty near gone, Andrew; but there is enough of it left for a little rest, and we had better get some sleep. We can't even guess what work there may be before us. Is your horse taken care of?"

"He's all right."

"Come to my lodgings, then, and I will find a room for you."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO VARIETIES OF VOLUNTEERS.

NEAR the plaza of El Paso was a two-story adobe house, built in the Pueblo style, without doors or windows, and with a large estufa, or underground floor.

A queer place for a wine-shop, one would think; but there

was a wine-shop in the building, and it was kept by one Tupe, a Pueblo Indian, and it was said, by the chosen few who had access to the retreat, that no better wine was to be found anywhere than Tupe dispensed to his thirsty customers.

One could get inside of the building only by mounting a ladder, and it was thus that Wallace Wardner and Andrew Crow effected an entrance, the morning after the fandango.

They passed down through two floors, in which were stowed a quantity of boxes and bales.

"These are my trading goods," said Wallace. "They are safer here than elsewhere. Below is Tupe's wine-cellar, which I have made the head-quarters of the mountain-boys. They can drink with Tupe, and make themselves uproariously drunk, if they want to, without getting into trouble. If they become obstreperous, he locks them up, and they thank him for it in the morning. They can gamble as much as they please here, without being fleeced by the Mexican monte dealers. They know the rules of the place, believe in them, and mutually help to maintain them. It is a good thing for the boys, and there are always some of them on hand. Come and see."

They descended into the estufa, where a charcoal fire was burning, to counteract the dampness. Barrels and casks and shelves of bottles were ranged about the room, and there were a few tables, boxes and stools — no other furniture.

Besides the proprietor, there were a dozen men in the apartment, most of them wild, rough, stalwart mountaineers. The others were Indians, differing but little in dress from the white men, from whom they could be distinguished only by close observation of the characteristics of their race.

Wallace Wardner was rapturously greeted by this assemblage, and introduced his companion, with whom no ceremony was necessary, as he found more than one acquaintance among the mountain men.

Wine was called for, and Wallace entered into conversation with his friends, giving them a full account of his own troubles and those of his brother. He could not have asked for more sympathy than he found. One and all cursed the Mexicans and Maximo Carovar in particular. One and all

declared that they were itchin', b'ilin', starvin' for excitement and adventure. One and all vowed that Wallace might bet on them, that they would stick to him through thick and thin, that they would be only too glad to serve him, hoping above all things that the service might eventuate in a scrimmage.

"As you are all so willing and ready, I will take you as I find you," said Wallace. "A dozen men may be needed; but a dozen will be enough. I want you to leave town quietly, not going together or in such a manner as to attract attention, and wait for me at Los Alanitos. I can't say yet when I will be there, or what we will do when I get there; but I suppose that we will make a visit to old Carovar's rancho."

After a little further conversation, Wallace and Andrew took their leave, and returned to the plaza.

Wallace had determined to make another effort to find the dark-skinned woman in the black lace mantilla, who had spoken to him at the fandango. He searched the town thoroughly, but without success. No one was acquainted with her, and no one knew what had become of her.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when he returned to the wine-shop at which he expected to meet Andrew, and he had been seated there but a few minutes, when Augustin Ruiz entered, in a state of great excitement.

"My dear friend!" he exclaimed, as he took a seat near Wallace. "I have the most terrible news to tell you. The Apaches are devils. Ah, the infidel wretches! May the curse of the Virgin and all the saints be forever upon them!"

"I know that they are terrible fellows," replied Wallace, "but what have they done lately? Calm yourself, and tell me what is the matter."

"A gentleman from New Mexico, named Maximo Carovar, arrived in town this morning, and brings the most fearful news. He says that the party whom we are expecting—Julia Ribero, with the ex-padre Ignatius and his servant—reached his rancho a few days ago, and stopped there to rest, before proceeding to El Paso. The night succeeding their arrival the rancho was attacked by Indians, and there was great slaughter."

"Great slaughter, was there?" interrupted Wallace. "Were they all killed?"

"Not all killed. Oh, no, señor; but there must have been great slaughter. Those Apaches are such murderers!"

"They were not all killed, then?" asked Wallace, speaking calmly and unconcernedly, though he was aching and burning to know what had really happened. "Were your friends saved?"

"Yes, señor, through the mercy of God. I do not know who were killed. Señor Carovar was too much hurried and excited to tell all the particulars. But the señorita Ribero, with padre Ignatius and his servant, were taken by the Apaches and carried away as prisoners."

"Señor Carovar was terribly excited, no doubt. How did he happen to escape?"

"By good fortune, he had a horse ready saddled, and he rode away when the Indians came in."

"The good fortune of Señor Carovar was really wonderful. He happened to have plenty of provisions in his saddlebags, no doubt?"

"Are you laughing at me, sir?" inquired Ruiz, upon whom gleamed a faint perception of the fact that he was being quizzed.

"By no means. It was a terrible misfortune, and I feel a deep sympathy for all concerned. What do you expect to do about it?"

"Señor Carovar has already taken measures to bring the robbers to justice. As soon as his story was known here, fifty *auxiliares* of El Paso were placed under his charge, and he started in pursuit of the savages."

"Ah! those brave *auxiliares*! They will surely give the Apaches what they deserve. Why did you not accompany them?"

"They will not allow me to do so. Señor Ribero went; but I am to remain here until they get news of the whereabouts of the enemy."

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance in this matter, Don Augustin. If I can do any thing to recover the lady from the Apaches, you may rest assured that I will do it. I must go and make some inquiries. You will have the kindness to

excuse me, as the matter admits of no delay. Do you wish to speak to me, sir?"

This question was addressed to Andrew Crow, who showed himself at the door of the wine-shop, looking as if he was ready to burst with laughter, and beckoning to Wallace to come to him.

With a hasty farewell, Wardner took leave of Don Augustin, and accompanied the Texan to the plaza.

When they were at a good distance from the wine-shop, Andrew seemed unable to restrain his mirth any longer, for he nearly dropped his rifle as he burst into a roar of laughter.

"What is the matter?" asked Wallace, who was not in a mirthful mood just then. "What are you laughing at? Have you heard the news?"

"Yes; I've heerd the news; but, Wallace, you ought to jest see'd them volunteers."

"The *auxiliares*?"

"Yes; the El Paso volunteers who went with old Carovar and t'other Don. They war in uniform, them sopers war—and it war the style of uniform that no two of 'em war to look alike, 'ceptin' in p'int of rags. You wouldn't sea'ce-ly hev thort, Wallace, that thar hosses could be wuss than themselves; but it's a fact that they war. Why, a hungry coyote could be persuaded into actin' hoss better'n any critter in the hull crowd. Ef them hosses had ever come across anythin' better'n a grease lash to eat, they'd hev wanted to lay down and die happy. Yes; the hosses war a little leaner and more ornary than the volunteers, but not much. As fur weepins—but you know 'em, Wallace. The lances and bows and arrers ain't wuth talkin' about; but I'd like to know ef anybody ever did fire off one of them rusty old big-mouthed escopetts. I mean to try to do it, some day when I think I need killin'. And that was the crowd old Carovar took to fight the 'Paches. This hyar bird is jest ready to die a-laughin'."

Wallace, who had smiled at the first mention of the *auxiliares*, could not help bursting into a laugh as the full glory of that warlike array flashed upon his mind.

"Could they talk, Andrew?" he asked

"Oh, they keverted! You kin jest bet yer bottom dollar on that. Ef big looks would count, those fifty war a regiment. Ef big words could wipe out red-skins, thar wouldn't be a grease-spot left of the 'Pache nation afore night. Wal, that Mexican Don paid 'em in advance for what they was gwine to do. He rattled out the shiners right afore folks, and settled up with them like a man. Yes, Wallace, he gi'n 'em about five cents apiece."

"And doubly paid them at that. In what direction did they go?"

"Now, Wallace, don't be jokin'. It's time to be doin' outlin'."

"I simply asked you which way they went."

"What way do you s'pose the 'Paches went?"

"Toward the north, of course."

"You know, then, that them volunteers went right south. They're allers mighty keen to know whar the Injuns are, so's they can go t'other way."

"Well, Andrew, we must be on the tramp. We will get our horses and push out to meet the boys on the other side of the river."

CHAPTER VII.

RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

WITHIN a very short time, Wallace Wardner and Andrew Crow were mounted, armed and provisioned, and they left the city by the northern road.

It was near the end of the afternoon when they set out and the night was far gone when they reached the rendezvous that Wallace had appointed for his friends. They roused up these latter, and stopped to rest and discuss a plan of action.

Wallace related the events that had transpired at El Paso, and proceeded to give his opinion concerning the state of affairs as it then existed.

"It is my belief," he said, "that there has been no attack

upon Carovar's ranch, or a sham attack. You all know that old reprobate well enough to be sure that the Apaches would not molest him. While all the country around him has been swept clean, he has never been touched, and he has lived there so long that there can be no doubt that he is in 'canoot' with the red-skins. You all know, too, that these New Mexicans disguise themselves as Apaches, and that it is as often they as the Indians who make the raids on the country around El Paso. You know, too, that old Carovar could not have escaped from an attack that was made in earnest. At all events, he would hardly have had time to pick his best horse out of the corral, and to saddle it, and to get his arms together, and to fill his saddlebags with cooked provisions. It seems plain to me that this business is meant as a blind. Carovar and the padre knew that my brother and Andrew Crow were looking for the girl, and they wanted to get her out of the way and hide the trail. Whoever made the attack on the ranch—if any has been made—it was a sham attack. How does it look to you, boys?"

"I think that El Gallo has laid it down about right," said Harvey Brinker, who was the oldest of the mountain-men. "Thar can't be but one thing ag'inst what he says, and that's this: Why did Carovar and the Don go south, when they knew that those others had gone north? Why didn't they go right whar they knew the folks to be, if it was sartin that thar was no fightin' at the end of the trail? The answer is, that it's Mexikin natur', when Injuns are about, to go just whar the Injuns ain't. They knew the volunteers wouldn't go whar the 'Paches war, and they only wanted to raise a dust, so's to blind some folks eyesight. But they hain't done it mach, I reckon, as far as heard from."

All present expressed their concurrence in these opinions, except Andrew, who only nodded, looked wistfully at Wallace, and said:

"Ef we on'y knew what's become o' Bruce, I should feel easier. Hev you got any idee on that pint, Wallace?"

"None at all. He has run a great risk, no doubt, and we can only hope that he has kept out of trouble. If he has been hurt, Maximo Carovar will have a heavy bill to settle. Let us mount, boys, and set out at once."

"What to?" asked Brinker.

"To Carovar's ranch. If there is any trail, we must find one end of it there."

"Suppose they won't let us in."

"Then we will go in."

The night was gone, dawn had passed, and the sun was two hours high, when the party reached Carovar's rancho. The gate was shut, and a sentry was stationed on a bastion, who halted them, and inquired their object.

A parley ensued, in the course of which Wallace Wardner stated that he had learned that the hacienda had been attacked by Apaches, and that he desired to enter, in order to ascertain the amount of damage that had been done, and to be set on the trail of the Indians.

He was informed that it was true that an attack had been made; but Señor Carovar would attend to the depredators. He had gone to El Paso for that purpose, and had directed that no person should be admitted during his absence.

Wallace and his friends, who were not so easily put off, declared that they had come with the intention of gaining an entrance to the hacienda. If peaceable admittance should be denied them, they would enter by force.

The major-domo, convinced that nothing was to be gained by resistance, ordered the gate to be thrown open, and the party entered in a body.

Once inside, they paid no attention to the Mexican attacks or the peons, but looked about for themselves, and drew their own conclusions.

"Very clever Apaches those were," remarked Wallace. "I can't see that they have done the least damage to the premises."

"Suppose we ask some of these people," suggested Andrew.

"What would be the use? They would only lie to us, and we ought not to lay unnecessary burdens on their consciences. We have seen enough to satisfy us, and now we have only to find out in what direction those supposed Apaches went. Some of these people must tell us."

He looked around, as if doubting which person he should settle upon for a witness.

The Mexicans, of whom some had understood what was said, and all were able to interpret the hostile countenances of the Americans, now manifested considerable trepidation, and the major-domo was beginning to sidle off, when Wallace stepped forward, and arrested his further progress by laying a hand on his shoulder.

"We want you, my friend," he said. "Somebody must tell us what those Apaches did when they were here, and in what direction they went when they left. You are in authority here, and are the very person who ought to tell us all about it."

The major-domo tried in vain to shake himself loose, and his companions cast threatening glances upon the Americans; but the latter handled their weapons as if they would be glad of an opportunity to use them, and the slight symptoms of resistance soon disappeared.

"It is none of your business," protested the major-domo. "Señor Carovar will attend to the Apaches. He wants none of your help, and you have no right to interfere."

"But we mean to do so. I am ready to hear your story, and I warn you that you had better speak the truth."

The Mexican protested, evaded, equivocated; but he was in the hands of a man who was terribly in earnest.

"Bring me a lariat," said Wallace, "and we will string this fellow up without any more words."

It may be that the Mexican had never had visible evidence of the persuasive effect of a lariat in extracting testimony from unwilling witnesses; but it is highly probable that he had heard of it; for he quailed at the sight of the rope, and trembled to his eyelashes.

"It is enough, señor!" he exclaimed, falling upon his knee and clasping his hands. "I will tell all I know; but my fellow-servants will bear me witness that I do it under compulsion, in the fear of my life. Ah, señor, why should I not tell you, when you know it already? Why should I not give my evidence, when the dead rise up and bid me confess?"

"What do you mean?" asked Wallace, sharply, as a terrible suspicion forced itself upon his mind. "Who has risen from the dead?"

"Were you not stricken down at the gate yonder, by the

blow of a machete? Did I not, with these eyes, see you placed upon a litter and carried away? Did I not, myself, help to prepare the litter? Did I not see the horrid gash in your head, and the blood streaming all over your face? And yet, here you are, alive and without a scratch."

Andrew Crow sprung forward as if to say something, but was restrained by the glance of the young hunter. Wallace knew, then, that his brother had been wounded and probably killed; but there was nothing in his appearance to show that he felt this fearful blow, except a lurid, threatening light in his eyes.

"You perceive, then," he said, replying to the major-domo, "that it is useless for you to attempt to lie to me. You may proceed, therefore, and tell all you know."

The Mexican made a clean breast of it. He knew nothing of the intentions of his master, except as far as he could guess them, and it was evident that his guessing abilities were not of a high order. He knew that the supposed Apaches were New Mexicans in disguise, that they had entered the hacienda without resistance, and that they had carried away the Mexican padre and his servant with the young lady whom the padre had brought to the hacienda. They had found Bruce Wardner—whom the major-domo supposed to be standing before him—in the angle of the gate and wall, where he could neither retreat nor advance, and had struck him down with a machete. The major-domo had been ordered to prepare a litter for the wounded man, but could not say whether he had been killed by the blow or merely wounded. He only knew, at the time, that he was lifeless when laid in the litter; but it was now plain that he had been killed, and had been miraculously restored to life without a blemish.

Had the young lady seen him? Wallace asked.

She had not, the major-domo was sure, up to the moment of departure, as the young man was in a close litter, with curtains around it. But why should these things be told to the señor, who must know all about it, although he had been dead?

"It is sufficient," said Wallace. "You have spoken the truth thus far, and I am satisfied. You will now tell me where they went to with the litter and the young lady."

The major-domo replied that he could not tell, as the destination had not been mentioned in his hearing. He could not tell even what direction they had taken. He knew that they had followed the road that led down the bluff; but the night was very dark, and he soon lost sight of them.

As he had gained as much information as was to be had, Wallace intimated to his comrades that he was ready to leave the hacienda; but Andrew Crow demurred to this, and took him aside, to speak to him privately.

"You don't mean to go off like this, I hope?" queried the Texan. "These rotten cusses hev killed Bruce. Ef they didn't do it theyselves they had a hand in it, and I think we ought to go through this ranch, and make some of 'em suffer."

"Do you suppose, Andrew," replied Wardner, "that my brother's blood is not as dear to me as it is to you? I know that he has been badly wounded, if not killed. If he is wounded, his chance is very small. Whatever his fate may be, Maximo Carovar is the man who is responsible for it, and he shall suffer for what he has done, if I live. But these people have not done the deed. They are only his servants, and not responsible for his crimes. We will not trouble them, as long as we have a chance to strike their master. Let us go, Andrew. The first thing necessary is to find Bruce and Julia Ribero."

Wallace led his party out at the gate, to the great relief of the major-domo, who closed it after them most joyfully.

As they rode down the bluff, the night was very dark, so dark that they could scarcely see the road, and Harvey Brinker asked the leader what he intended to do, as it was too dark to follow the trail of the raiders.

"We will ride on," replied Wallace. "We know that they did not follow the road that brought us here, and there is but one road leading to the north. We will follow it until daylight which is not far off, and then we can look for the trail."

CHAPTER VIII.

TRYING TIMES FOR BRUCE.

CAROVAR's major-domo had told all he knew concerning Bruce Wardner and his hurt; but he had not told all that had happened.

A peon belonging to the estate had found the young man's horse, which had happened to break its hobble, and had strayed from the thicket in which it had been concealed. The peon had recognized the animal as one that he had seen at the rancho during the day, and had reported the fact to his master.

The consequence was, that most of the young man's proceedings were noted, and arrangements were made to intercept and capture him. These measures had taken a different course from that which had been intended by Carovar. Bruce was discovered by one of the raiders, who at once assaulted him with a macheto, and gave him what was supposed to be a death-blow.

It was a terrible blow, and Bruce would have had nothing more to complain of in this world, if it had not been that the macheto—a very heavy knife, used in cutting bushes—glanced as it struck, inflicting a severe flesh wound, and producing unconsciousness by concussion of the brain.

There arose a discussion as to what should be done with him, and Carovar settled it by deciding that he would keep him and take care of him.

The truth is, the old reprobate, whose first thought was always of money, had immediately searched the young man's pockets, and had discovered a letter to a prominent merchant of El Paso, conveying the information that Bruce Wardner was a gentleman of property and entitled to almost unlimited credit.

A chance was thus offered, of which Carovar was not slow to avail himself. He determined to take the prisoner to the

same hiding-place to which Julia Ribero was to be conveyed, and to hold him for a ransom, negotiating with the El Paso merchant for his release as an Apache captive.

He wisely overruled the Jesuitical arguments of Padre Ignatius, who thought it would be best for all parties if the young man should be left to die, and persuaded the priest to examine his wound.

When it had been discovered that the wound was not necessarily mortal or even dangerous, it was carefully dressed, and the wounded man was placed in a litter, to be carried with the party that was about to leave.

The disguised New Mexicans who had made the raid on the rancho were fifteen in number, and these composed the escort of the padre and the prisoners, under the leadership of Manuel Vierraz, a trusty follower of Señor Carovar.

As for Bruce Wardner, he was entirely unconscious of what was going on, until the party had left the rancho and were descending the bluff, when the motion of the litter awakened him from his swoon.

It was but a momentary awakening. He had no recollection of what had transpired, and was only dimly conscious of a heavy pain in his head, a general numbness of his limbs, and an unwillingness, as well as inability, to move even a muscle. He sunk into a stupor again, and remained in that condition, with occasional misty awakenings, during the remainder of the journey.

He was fairly awakened, at last, by the sound of voices, and there arose in his throbbing and disordered brain, a dim consciousness that he had a part to play—that he might be, helpless as he was, more or less responsible for his own existence—that he must make the best possible use of his faculties, in battling against the odds that had overtaken him.

He had no doubt that he was in the hands of enemies; the first words that reached his ears convinced him of that fact; and he opened one eye slightly, that he might distinguish who and what the speakers were.

He saw a man of medium height, whose appearance presented a fair imitation of the customary stage brigand. A little less dirt would have made him more presentable in good

society, but would have detracted from his character as a Mexican. By the side of this man stood a woman, tall, of fine form and commanding appearance, with dark skin and raven black hair, and with large black eyes that were full of fire and touched with melancholy. She was neatly, almost richly, dressed in black, and the tones of her voice, as well as her general appearance, bespoke her a person of authority and dignity.

Bruce also saw that he was in a small, square room. There was a narrow slit in the adobe wall, that served for a window; but the room would have been as dark as a dungeon, if the door had not been open. He felt that he was lying on a couch of loose straw, and he also felt—which he knew to be a good sign—that he would be glad of something to eat.

These sensations having been summed up in an instant, he closed his eye, and lay perfectly quiet, to give his sense of hearing a fair chance to attend perfectly to its business.

"Is it certain that he was to be brought here and kept here?"

It was the woman who spoke, and her voice, rich and musical, was full of womanly feeling, while it expressed no little surprise.

"Such were the orders of Señor Carovar," replied the man. "This prisoner is to be well cared for and kept safe."

"There is no danger of his escaping. Did Señor Carovar know who he was?"

"He had never seen him before; but the padre knows all about him. He is one of those Texan devils; but he is rich, the capitano says. So many of those Americans of the north are rich! Jesu Maria! And we, at our best, can hardly keep body and soul together. But they may well have something in this world, I suppose, as Satan is sure to get them in the next."

"You are talking like a simpleton, Manuel. Answer my questions plainly and in few words. Do you know his name?"

"Not I."

"Does the capitano know it?"

"How should he? It is not likely that any of us could pronounce it, if we should hear it."

"Manuel, that wounded stranger is El Gallo?"

The man started. He, in common with many others, had often heard of the handsome and dashing young Texan, whose daring exploits, and whose reputed wealth, had made his name ring along the Mexican frontier. Manuel bent down, and gazed at the wounded man with interest.

"I am glad to hear what you tell me," he said. "The capitano is sure of a heavy ransom; for it is well known that El Gallo is a wealthy trader. We have but to attend to our duty, señora, and to dress the wound."

"By whom has it been dressed?"

"By Padre Ignatius."

"Let him come and dress it again, then."

"That would hardly be safe, señora. Padre Ignatius has already wished to get rid of this young man. He stands in the way of some plan in which the padre is interested. It is possible that the good padre might be prompted to put a knife into his heart, and that would not suit the purposes of your husband."

"Do not speak of my husband! I have no husband!" exclaimed the lady, as the blood rushed up into her cheeks, and angry fires were lighted in her dark eyes.

"Is he not your husband, Señora Carovar?"

"He is not, and he knows it too well. Else why should he seek to bring another here to supplant me?"

The Mexican stared at her, with elevated eyebrows.

"But you know nothing of this," she said, "and it is not necessary that you should. I will dress the wound of this young man. Wait for me, Manuel."

She left the room, and soon returned with a basin of water, scissors, bandages and other articles. She knelt down by the side of Bruce, and proceeded to wash his wound and bandage it. In this work she showed great aptness, with a wonderful delicacy of touch. At the same time she showed an amount of tender, womanly pity, that the nature of the wound was hardly sufficient to justify.

Bruce lay perfectly still during this operation, breathing lightly, but giving no other sign of life. He must have felt

some pain; but he was careful not to wince. If a hand or an arm was lifted, it dropped lifeless. At one time he was sure that a tear fell upon his face, and this affected him strangely; but he remained motionless.

When the dressing was finished, the señora stood up, and looked down upon him compassionately.

"They have cut off his hair since I saw him last," she said. "I can't understand this. It seems strange to me that El Gallo should be here. It must be true, as they tell us, that he can pass from one place to another with marvelous quickness. It is strange, too, that he still lies in a stupor. His wound is a bad one; but it is only a flesh-wound."

"He has lost a great deal of blood, señora," suggested Manuel.

"No doubt; but that is not sufficient to account for this continued stupor. Let us leave him, Manuel, and I will bring him some food shortly. If he should chance to revive, I think that he will be willing to eat."

"If you will go first, señora, I will follow, and lock the door."

"It is useless to lock the door. You see that he is utterly helpless. He can not even move, and it is not to be supposed that he would attempt to escape. Come."

They went out together, closing the door without locking it, and Bruce, after opening his eyes wide, and stretching himself to ease his cramped limbs, laid back again and thought of his situation.

In the first place, he was *there*, wherever it was. In the next place, father Ignatius was there, and it was quite certain that Julia Ribero was there also. She, as well as himself, was still in the power of Carovar. How far they had traveled since leaving the rancho, in what direction they had come, or how much time had been consumed by the journey, were questions upon which he was obliged to plead entire ignorance.

He could not even guess where he was; but it was a great consolation to know that he was near Julia. It was possible that he might rescue her before either of them could be removed from that place. It was very improbable; but possibilities look large to young eyes. For himself, the door was open, and he might walk out if he wished to.

But not yet. His head felt easier, and all his limbs felt whole and sound; but he was quite weak from loss of blood and lack of food. He must wait for strength before attempting any enterprise. Besides, he might gain valuable information by watching and listening a while longer.

Another point was, that he was to be held for a ransom, and that he had been mistaken—at least by the woman—for some other person. This puzzled him, and he could only come to the conclusion that he had been mistaken for his brother. He had never heard that Wallace was called El Gallo, but thought it likely that just such an appellation would be bestowed upon him.

The woman had said that she would return with food, and he would soon see her again. He would like to know whether the tear which she had dropped upon his face had been shed for his brother's sake. If so, what connection could there be between Wallace Wardner and this handsome, sorrowful woman, who was called Señora Carovar, but was not the wife of the raiding ranchero?

He heard her step outside, and he closed his eyes, and relapsed into his condition of feigned unconsciousness.

She brought a tray containing food and drink, and placed it on the floor by his side.

"Not awake yet," she said, when she had knelt down and felt of his hands and brow. "This is a most unaccountable stupor. His injury must be far worse than it appears to be, and it needs greater medical skill than I possess to judge of his condition. If this continues much longer, he must die. He can not know, surely, that Juanita is here. If he should awake, ought I to tell him? I will try to give her a hint that will bring her to him. Her presence will arouse him, if he is ever to be aroused."

Señora Carovar left the room, closing the door gently, and Bruce Wardner thought that his situation was becoming more mysterious. Who was Juanita, whose presence was to arouse him? It might be hard to resist her influence; but he must resist it, if she should come.

He felt hungry, in the mean time, and was strongly tempted to eat and drink; but he feared that the food would be misused, and that the game he was playing would be suspected.

It would be better, he concluded, to postpone eating, at least for a while.

He had fully formed this resolution—and it was not an easy thing to do—when he again heard steps at the door, and was obliged to drop back into a lethargy.

But he lay on his back, and was able to see, through one half shut eye, under the bandage that surrounded his head, the person who entered the room.

A most beautiful girl, tall and lithe and graceful, with Spanish complexion and eyes and hair; just blooming into womanhood, her eyes all fire and her lips all sweetness. One look was enough, and Bruce Wardner's half-opened eye closed like an oyster shell.

It was with a half-wondering, half-expectant glance that she entered the room. As her eyes fell upon the figure on the straw, there came over her face a look of doubt and fear, and her hands were clasped convulsively together.

Then she sprung forward, with a wild cry, and threw herself on the floor by the side of the wounded man, bursting into tears, and addressing him with the most endearing epithets.

"*Mi amigo! mi querido!* Is it thus I find you at last? Speak to me! Oh, speak to me! For the love of heaven, let me hear you say that you live! Did you believe that I had deserted you, that I had proved forgetful of your bounty, of your great goodness, of your true love? They stole me away, my love, and brought me here, where I am held a prisoner by Señor Carovar, and now you also are in his hands wounded, if not dead."

She stooped her face down to Bruce's mouth, and could feel his breath on her cheeks.

"He is not dead," she said, and an expression of agony settled upon her face. "He lives and breathes, and why does he not speak to me? Tell me, *mi querido*, that you still love your little Juanita, that the tale I have heard is a false one, that you have not deserted me for another. Whether you love me or not, speak to me, and tell me the truth!"

The situation was a very perplexing one to Bruce Wardner. Here was a beautiful girl, wetting his face with her tears, and lavishing endearments upon him. That, of itself

was trying to a young man of ardent temperament; but it was plain that she had mistaken him for his brother, and he remembered Julia. She seemed to charge his brother, through him, with having been false to her. Ought he not to reveal his identity, and put an end to her agony? He was strongly tempted to do so; but reflected that such a revelation would not prove his brother's truth, while it would probably be better for her, as well as for Julia, in the end, that he should remain silent.

He neither spoke nor moved, and the girl ceased her sobbing and wailing.

Suddenly she plucked at a hair chain that encircled his neck, and drew forth a small locket, that contained a miniature of Julia Ribero.

With a quick action she opened it, cast one glance at the face, dashed it down, and rushed out of the room.

"This is queer enough," thought Bruce, "and I am afraid that I ought to have spoken. But it is useless to puzzle my muddled brain about it now. When it is dark I will crawl out of this hole, and then I will soon learn where I am, and what can be done. Until then, patience."

When the approach of night was indicated by the fact that no more rays of light were filtered through the narrow window, Señora Carovar came in, bringing a candle, which she placed on the floor. After a look at the still-motionless form of the wounded man, she went out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

"Now for it!" thought Bruce. "I will eat a little, and then I will prowl about and see what sort of a den this is that I have got into."

He began with the intention of eating a little; but he ate with what is popularly called a "coming appetite." In a few moments he had cleared the tray of provisions, and was still hungry.

Then he rose, yawned, stretched himself, felt of his head and limbs, and took a step toward the door.

As he did so, the door was gently opened, and a man's head was thrust in at the opening.

CHAPTER IX.

JULIA AND JUANITA.

JULIA RIBERO—tender-eyed, soft-voiced, warm-hearted Julia—had suffered untold agony during her long journey from Texas; but the pain at her heart had never been greater than it was when Bruce Wardner and Andrew Crow left Carovar's hacienda, after they had called to inquire concerning her.

She believed that they had been deceived, and that they had gone on to El Paso to seek her there. She could hardly hope that those two, stanch and earnest friends as they were, would really be able to bring her out of her troubles; but it grieved her to know that they had been sent in the wrong direction. She felt that her last hope had slipped out from under her, and that she must fall helplessly into the abyss that had opened before her.

The sham attack upon the hacienda gave her little concern, and she attempted no resistance when she was led out to be carried away by the supposed raiders. She shuddered at the wild forms and barbarous manners of her new captors, but could only feel that she was exchanging one captivity for another.

As she was so unconcerned, she had presence of mind enough to notice that Carovar and his people were unharmed, that there was no scene of pillage or burning, that the affair resembled in no particular the accounts that she had heard of Indian attacks. From these facts she drew her own conclusions, and was confirmed in them by father Ignatius, who came and spoke to her.

"Fear not, my daughter," he said. "You will soon be restored to your loving father, and to your own country and people."

It was not, then, a different captivity, but the same captivity in a different shape. She could not perceive any rea-

son for the change, and it was useless to ask the padre, as she could not believe his replies.

It was dark when the party reached their destination, and Julia could discern nothing but a shapeless collection of low buildings. In fact, she was too weary to investigate anything.

She was led into a room where there was a bed, and was left to herself. Thankful for this privilege, she threw herself upon the bed, and slept soundly.

In the morning she was visited by a lady, who announced herself as Señora Carovar, who spoke to her kindly and gently, and supplied all her wants.

Father Ignatius next called upon her, and brought her a missal as a companion for her leisure hours.

"You have only to rest yourself now, my daughter," he said. "Compose your mind and recruit your body, in order that you may be ready for another journey. Your father will soon be here, and with him will come Don Augustin Ruiz, an excellent young gentleman, of the best possible disposition, belonging to one of the first families of Mexico. It is he whom you are destined to wed, and I congratulate you upon that fact, as he is in every way worthy of your esteem and affection."

"If you suppose that I will wed him, you are greatly mistaken, father Ignatius," quietly replied Julia.

"I do not suppose it, my daughter. I know it. Such matters are not arranged in Mexico as in Texas."

"Nevertheless, I will not wed him. I shall not submit to any authority in this matter, not even to that of my father. You may shake your head and affect to shudder, but I know that I am right. I think you will find that I can not be forced into a marriage, even in Mexico. I have been stolen away from my mother and my friends, and I desire you to understand that all these proceedings are against my will and in spite of my continued protests. You may use force; but you can compel my consent to nothing."

"Do you think so? Harden not your heart, my daughter. You need hope nothing from your Texan lover. I have reason to know that it is impossible for him to assist you in any particular."

"That may be so; but I will still trust in God. I will thank you to leave me, as your presence is unpleasant to me."

Father Ignatius bowed himself out, after advising Julia to read her missal and compose her mind. His words had troubled her to such an extent that tears came to her eyes, and flowed abundantly.

The tears were a relief, and then she fell into a reverie, from which she was aroused by the entrance of another person. This was a girl, of near her own age, and Julia was heartily glad to see her, feeling that she had at last found some one who could sympathize with her sorrows.

The girl, after having ascertained that Julia could speak Spanish, introduced herself as Juanita, and the two sat down on the bed, and proceeded, after the manner of girls, to open their hearts to each other. Julia soon told her story, making her new friend acquainted with her family difficulties, her lover, and the adventures she had encountered since she had been taken from her Texas home.

Juanita, also, had a story to tell, more thrilling than that to which she had listened, and fully as pathetic. It was a story of Indian capture and rescue, of orphanage, of protection and care by her rescuer, a handsome and gallant young gentleman, whose wonderful qualities she could find no epithets to match. He had loved her, and a day had been set for their marriage. During his absence she had been secretly conveyed away by the emissaries of a wretch whose detestable traits no words could sufficiently describe. It was enough to say that he was named Maximo Carovar, a name that comprised all that was cruel, traitorous and despicable. She had been brought to that place as a prisoner and was daily expecting his arrival.

"We are fellow-prisoners then, dear Juanita," said Julia. "Our fate is a hard one, and I see no light ahead; but we must not despair. God sees us and will care for us. Perhaps we may do something to help each other. Hush!"

The last words had been heard by one of Carovar's servants, who was passing near the door. He entered, and his suspicions were aroused that the two girls were plotting an escape. He deemed it his duty to separate them, and led Juanita away.

It was not until the evening of the next day that Julia was again gladdened by the presence of her new friend, who came in on tiptoe, closing the door behind her very softly.

"We must not speak loud," she said, "or we will be overheard and separated again. I have been shut up in my room, and have not been able to come to see you; but Sofora Carovar let me out to-day. She is very kind, and looks pityingly upon me. I believe she would help me to escape, if she could, or if she dared to do so."

"Your brave and dashing lover will seek you," replied Julia. "Surely El Gallo, if he deserves his name, and I have no doubt that he does, will scour the country to find you."

"He would be seeking me now, if he knew that I had been stolen away from the good lady in whose care he left me. But he was obliged to go far north, into the mountains, among the Indians, and I can not guess when he will return. There was a slander spread in El Paso, that he did not mean to make me his wife; but I know from whom the slander came, and I give it no thought. He is too brave, too good, too noble, to deceive me."

"That is right, Juanita. Never believe any idle tales concerning your lover. I would believe one word that my Bruce had uttered, in the face of a thousand reports. I know that I can trust him, and that he is true to me. Here is his portrait. Look at it, and tell me whether you can see any thing but truth and honor in that face."

Julia drew from her bosom a locket containing a miniature, and opened it.

Juanita glanced at the face, and then snatched the locket, and held it up before her dilated eyes. Then she sunk upon the floor, covered her face with her hands, and uttered a wailing cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Julia. "What have you seen in that face?"

"El Gallo! El Gallo!" moaned Juanita.

"For heaven's sake tell me what you mean?"

"It is he! It is he! That is El Gallo, my friend, my protector, my lover! The story was true, and he is false. This is the meaning of his long absence, and I have no more

hope. When the words of love were on his lips, and when he promised to marry me, he was already betrothed to you."

"If he has been false to you, Juanita, he has been false to me as well. But there must be some mistake about this. If Bruce has ever been in El Paso, I have not heard of it."

"There can be no mistake. Do I not know the face? And I thought he was all my own!"

"Hush! Not so loud. I hear some one without."

It was Señora Carovar. She was speaking, or seemed to be, to some one near her, and at her words the hearts of the two girls ceased to beat.

"It is as you said, Manuel. The wounded man in the north room is El Gallo. I have dressed his wound; but he lies in a stupor from which I can not arouse him. I have left the door ajar, that he may have air."

This was the hint that Señora Carovar had intended to give to Juanita.

Her steps were heard as she walked away, and Juanita turned to her friend, with her eyes full of a desperate resolution.

"He is here," she said, "and wounded. How has this come to pass? But it is useless to ask. I will go to him. I know what is meant by the north room, and I can easily slip out and see him."

"Let me go with you," pleaded Julia.

"No, no. What might be safe for one would not be safe for two. It is best that I should go alone. I will bring you a true report."

The Mexican girl glided out at the door as silently and swiftly as a ghost, leaving Julia overwhelmed with wonder and doubt and fear.

After a little while she returned, and the color had left her cheeks, and the light had died out of her eyes. She came in slowly and droopingly, and held out both her hands to Julia, with an expression of utter hopelessness.

"It is all over," she said. "He is yours. If I could give him to you, I would; but he was never mine."

"Why do you say this, Juanita? Have you any proof?"

"He carries your picture in a locket, such a locket as the one you showed me."

"That is Bruce Wardner, without doubt. Our lockets are exactly similar. But, is it possible that there can be no mistake in this matter? Yes! Come to me, Juanita. A light breaks in upon me. Come very close, my love, and listen while I whisper to you. Bruce Wardner has a brother."

"That is not strange."

"He has a twin brother."

"That is very likely, too."

"Do you not guess what I mean? I have never seen Wallace Wardner; but I have heard that he resembles his brother. Bruce said to me once—but I treated it as a mere jest—that he must never let his brother come near me after we are married, as I might mistake him for my husband. I laughed, and would not have thought of these words again, had it not been for this hour. I tell you, Juanita, El Gallo is Bruce Wardner's twin brother."

As Juanita was still jealous and incredulous, Julia asked her whether she knew the name of El Gallo.

"His name? I have never heard it. It was so hard to pronounce, that everybody called him El Gallo."

"Have you seen it written?"

"Yes; I have seen it written."

"Did it look like this?" and Julia wrote the name of Bruce Wardner.

"No; not all like that."

"Did it look like this?" writing the name of Wallace Wardner.

"Yes; that is it."

"What I have told you is true, then, and El Gallo is the twin brother of my Bruce,"

"You have given me life, Julia. You have made me so happy! But, to think that the brother of El Gallo, that your lover, is lying here wounded, and in the power of these people!"

"Hush, Juanita! Some one is coming."

CHAPTER X.

CAROVAR'S SCHEMING.

WHEN Maximo Carovar had finished his "little game" with the *auxiliares* of El Paso, he rode back to town with his ragged escort, and then hastened away with Señor Ribero and Augustin Ruiz, intending to stop at his rancho on the route to the place whither Julia Ribero had been taken.

When they were fairly across the river, Señor Ribero sought an explanation, as the object of Carovar's scheming was not yet entirely apparent to him.

He was a man of very gentlemanly dress and manners, showing his nationality in his appearance, as well as in all he said and did. He was a handsome man—in the Mexican style—but there was an expression about him that may be best characterized, perhaps, as unreliable. A man easily influenced, a man who might be expected to desert his friends under the pressure of a superior will or for the sake of gain. Not at all the sort of man who could be depended upon through good and evil report, who would stand to the truth for its own sake, or would face death for a matter of principle. Selfish enough, no doubt, but with some good qualities of heart. Not a bad man by nature, but family-ridden and unreasonably avaricious.

"I have not yet learned," he said, "why father Ignatius and my daughter did not come direct to El Paso."

"For two good reasons, my dear sir," replied Carovar. "The young lady was really too weary and exhausted to travel any further, and absolutely required rest. Again, those Texans were pursuing them, and would surely have overtaken them before they could reach El Paso."

"There were only two."

"But they were Texans, and those Texans are devils. They knew, when they were at the hacienda, that the young lady and the priests were still there. I did not deceive them, and did not expect to, though I was obliged to use a little

dissimulation with the good padre, who, as I verily believe, would have been willing to sacrifice the young man, and that would not have suited me.

"Believing that they might be waiting and watching in the vicinity, I sent for my Apaches to make an attack on the hacienda, and rode to El Paso to inform you of what had been done, and to spread the report that the young lady and the padre had been carried away by Apaches.

"That ruse, I think, succeeded very well, especially since the wounding and capture of the young Texan, which was an event I had not calculated upon. If he has any friends who are assisting him in this search, they will go in pursuit of the Apaches. In the meantime your daughter is in a safe place of concealment. We will go to her at once, and you can be well on your way to Soñora, while the friends of her Texan lover may be hunting a will-o'-the-wisp far to the north."

The mind of Señor Ribero, like that of Carovar, was of a jesuitical cast, such as prefers intricate scheming to straightforward action, and he fully approved of the proceedings so far.

"As I understand you," he said, "you propose to hold the young Texan for a ransom?"

"The Apaches will do so, you perceive, and it is probable that I will conduct the negotiation for them."

"I comprehend; but I have been thinking of another plan. Let us ride on, as I do not wish Don Augustin to hear this."

They rode on, leaving the young Mexican to follow with Señor Ribero's servant.

"My daughter," continued Ribero, "will be unwilling to marry my young friend behind us. That is to be expected. It is possible that she may prove obstinate and difficult to control. In that event, it would be quite convenient for me to have possession of the young Texan, in order that I might influence her through him."

"I understand you, my dear sir. You need not say another word. I only desire to stipulate that I am to have my ransom-money."

"Precisely. If I do not return him to you, I will pay you

the sum you may fix upon for his ransom. I have not yet decided any thing in this matter ; but I will consult father Ignatius."

" Ah, you may be sure that the padre will fall in with your opinion. Let us ride on, señor, or it will be night when we reach the rancho."

An unpleasant surprise awaited Señor Carovar, when he rode in at the gate of his hacienda. The major-domo came to meet him, followed by the rest of the servants, and related, with fear and trembling, the story of the visit of the mountain-men, led by Wallace Wardner.

" What is this ?" demanded Carovar, frowning severely upon them all, but chiefly upon the major-domo. " What sort of a ridiculous story is this that you have trumped up, to excuse yourselves for permitting the intrusion of those strangers ? Do you suppose that I will believe this wild tale of a ghost, the leader of living men ?"

But it was true, the major-domo declared, and he called on all present to witness his words. The young Texan—the same man who had been struck down at the gate, and who had been carried away dead, or in a dying condition—had appeared to them there, in that yard, and had spoken to them. He was alive and well, and there was no blood on his face, or the least sign of a wound on his head. He knew every thing that had happened, and the major-domo could not help confessing the truth to a man who had risen from the dead.

Señor Carovar emptied all the vials of his indignation upon the head of the luckless major-domo and his fellow-servants. He abused them, he cursed them, he thunder-and-lightninged at them. He devoted them, again and again, to the infernal regions for a set of miserable fools and cowards ; but his tone was different when he afterward spoke of the subject to Señor Ribero.

" I have no patience with those dogs," he said ; " and yet, I have no doubt that they believe the tale they have told. They would not all stand to it so stoutly unless there was some foundation for it. What can it mean ? It is rank nonsense, of course ; but those Texans are such devils ! I verily believe that some of them have bargained their souls to Satan in advance."

Ribero crossed himself, and seemed to think that such a view of the case was very probable.

"It is likely enough," continued Carovar, "that the demon gives them the power of dying and resuming life as they please. Who knows? It is a strange story that we have heard. But we must remain here to-night, señor. It is useless to attempt to continue our journey before morning."

In the evening of the next day they were near the place of their destination, and Carovar, who had been noticing the trail they were following, came to a place where it forked, one branch going toward the river, and the other continuing in a northerly direction.

He dismounted from his horse, closely scrutinized the two trails, and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"There is nothing to trouble us, after all," he said. "Ghost or no ghost, the accursed Texans have made a mistake. Here is the trail that our friends have taken. It leads to the left, across the river, to the place where we will find them; but those others have gone on toward the north to hunt the Apaches. Come on, Señor Ribero. You shall soon see your daughter."

It was dark when they reached the collection of huts and dilapidated buildings on the other side of the river.

Carovar was met by the señora, who was generally believed to be his wife, and he greeted her politely but coldly.

After giving directions for the comfort of Ribero and young Ruiz, he left them, and went to inspect the locality.

As he was walking through a passage, the sound of a woman's voice fell upon his ear, and he opened a door that admitted him into the presence of Julia Ribero and Juanita.

It would be too much to say that his appearance produced a pleasant effect upon either of them. In fact, they regarded him with looks of aversion, if not of horror, and their glances gave him to understand that they did not appreciate the favor of his presence.

"Are you not glad to see me, my pretty doves?" he asked. "You ought to be; for I have done each of you a great kindness. As for you, Señorita Ribero, I have saved you from the

machinations of certain Texas wretches who would gladly have torn you from your natural protector, your father, who is longing to embrace you."

"I know what you have done," replied Julia, with a scornful glance. "You have done nothing that entitles you to my gratitude, nothing that you might not better have left undone. I owe you no thanks, and abuse is beneath me."

"As for you, my pretty Juanita, I have done you the greatest possible kindness. I have delivered you from the clutches of a rascally American adventurer, who had pretended to protect you only that he might make you his wife after his own fashion. As he is already married, and loves half a dozen other women, you could not claim any great share in his affection; whereas, you will have all of mine. You shall not be compelled to peck in the barnyard of any gamecock, my pretty bird, but shall have a gilded cage, and be fed with golden grain."

"Monster!" exclaimed Juanita, all her soul flashing out of her eyes, that glared upon him like those of a tigress. "I abhor you and your lies. You have stolen me away from my friend and protector; but you need not think that you will gain by that wicked action. I know that El Gallo is a true and honorable man, and I believe that he will yet punish you for this outrage."

"Your talk is silly, my dear child. There lives no man who can encounter Maximo Carovar and defeat him."

"When El Gallo strikes his spurs into you, he will make you sore for many misdeeds."

"I would eat his spurs with my penknife. But it is useless to waste words with you. Señorita Ribero, your father has arrived, and with him the young gentleman whom he destines for your husband. Both are anxious to see you, and I will bring them to you."

He left the room, and soon returned with Señor Ribero, Augustin Itatz and padre Ignatius.

Having performed this duty, he went to seek Manuel, who was easily found, as he had important intelligence to communicate.

"What is it?" asked Carovar.

"It is concerning the wounded man, whom we brought

from the hacienda, and who is now lying in the north room."

"Is he really there? Are you sure? Has he not been away since he was brought here?"

Manuel was sure that he was there, and that he had not left the premises.

"I have heard the strangest story about him," and Carova proceeded to give his lieutenant the account that he had received from the major-domo and his fellow-servants.

To his amazement, Manuel crossed himself, and shook his head, rolling up his eyes in holy horror.

"What do you mean by those actions?" asked Carovar.

"Who knows but the story may be true?" replied Manuel, crossing himself again.

"Idiot! Have you not told me that the fellow has been lying there ever since he was brought to the place, and that he has not stirred from the room?"

"Certainly, señor; but it is so strange! He has lain there so quiet all this time, without speaking or moving. He has eaten nothing, and has hardly even breathed. Nothing like it was ever seen before."

"That is strange, indeed. What do you make of it?"

"Who can say? Is it not possible that his body alone lies there, while his soul is roaming here and there and everywhere? Does not the devil sometimes give such power to those accursed Texans? Besides, señor, do you know who this wounded man is?"

"Some miserable Texan. I have forgotten his name; but it is of little consequence."

"It is El Gallo!"

Carovar's astonishment broke forth in an oath.

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"Señora Carovar told me so. She dressed his wound, and she says he is El Gallo."

"What does she know of El Gallo?"

"She has seen him at El Paso."

Carovar clapped his hands.

"Aha, my pretty Juanita!" he exclaimed. "I have you fast now. You may try in vain to break your cage, and I

will soon cure you of your vixenish ways. I will go in and see this fellow, Manuel. If he is as helpless as you say, it is not likely that he can hurt me, and I am armed, and I fear no man. You need not come with me, Manuel."

Manuel looked as if he had no desire to pay a visit to such a suspicious person. In fact, he intended to keep as far away from him as possible."

Carovar went to the room in which Bruce Wardner lay and opened the door.

CHAPTER XI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

It was no cordial greeting that Señor Ribero received from his daughter when he entered her room, and he did not act as if he expected such. He stopped at the door, and stared at her without speaking.

"Is this my father?" she asked, as she advanced and offered her hand.

"I hope that you have not quite forgotten me," he replied. "Why do you not embrace me, my child?"

"The manner in which I have been brought here, sir, does not make me feel disposed to embrace anybody."

"Are you not glad to see me?"

"I am both glad and sorry. The circumstances are such as to make me more sorry than glad."

"I perceive that you have been taught to dislike me. You have also been taught other lessons which must be unlearned. You will at least be courteous. Here is a young friend in whom I take a deep interest, and whom I desire to introduce to you—Señor Augustin Raiz."

Augustin had nearly forgotten his good-breeding in gazing at Julia. Her beauty surpassed his expectations, and he thought he would have cause to congratulate himself on obtaining a prize, if she should become his. He felt that he would be glad to marry her without her love, trusting that in time she would place her heart in the keeping of him

who could claim her hand. He bowed very low, without removing his eyes from her face, and she bent slightly in response to his salutation.

"I hope that you and this young gentleman will be very good friends," remarked Señor Ribero.

"I hope that I shall be friendly to all who are really my friends," replied Julia.

Father Ignatius seemed to think that the time had come for him to interfere. The calm and firm attitude of Julia did not please him at all, especially as it was met by no corresponding firmness on the part of her father, who had a timid and irresolute air, as if he felt that he was in the wrong, that he had placed himself in a false position.

It would not do to leave the recusant Julia in the ascendancy, and it rested with father Ignatius to bring about a different state of affairs.

"It appears to me to be proper," he said, addressing himself to Señor Ribero, "that you should enter into an explanation with your daughter. It is fitting that she should understand for what purpose she has been brought here, and that she should be told what is expected of her. If she will not respond to parental affection, she must succumb to parental authority."

"You are right, without doubt," replied Ribero; "but the peculiar nature of this meeting has unnerved me, and I hardly feel capable of entering into particulars. Suppose you make the explanation."

This was what father Ignatius was willing enough to do, and he cleared his throat and addressed himself to Julia:

"I will merely allude, my daughter, to the unhappy difficulties that have separated your father and your mother. It is enough to say that they were mainly caused by her obstinate refusal to conform to the usages of your father and his family.

"It was natural and proper that your father should wish to educate you in his own belief, and he placed you in a convent school for that purpose. From that shelter you were removed by your mother. She took you away quietly, secretly, like a thief in the night."

Julia had been listening with bent head. She now looked up, and there was no sign of shrinking in the splendid eyes that gazed right into the heart of the padre.

"Let me speak one word," she said. "You may say of me what you please; but my mother is sacred to me, and you must use no more such language in connection with her name."

"Must not?" The ex-padre ground his teeth.

"I have said it."

"I am not accustomed to being dictated to by a child. But I can let that pass. No words of mine could sufficiently characterize the act. She fled, and took refuge in Texas, where she persisted in living apart from her husband, and in bringing up his child in a manner that could not fail to be intensely displeasing to him. As was to be expected, under such influences, your mind became corrupted, and you contracted a misplaced affection for a young Texan. This was carried so far, with the approbation of your mother, that you promised to marry him, although such a marriage would have been contrary to the laws of God and man."

"On that point I must differ with you," remarked Julia. "The law of man I am sure that I will not violate, and the law of God I will not violate knowingly."

"I am aware of the loose laws and customs of the Texans, and it is not to be supposed, considering the influences that have surrounded you, that you would know or heed the law of God. But it was the duty of your natural protector and your true friends to rescue you from a position that was so full of peril to your prospects here and hereafter. I was chosen to accomplish that purpose, and I succeeded in bringing you away from Texas."

"Like a thief in the night?" suggested Julia.

"In a manner that was fully justified by the end I had in view. You have been brought thus far on your journey, and in the morning you will set out for Sonora, in which department your father is now living. You will go in charge of your father, and will be accompanied by myself and Señor Ruiz. This young gentleman, as I have already informed you, is of excellent family and disposition, and he has been chosen for your husband. The contract has been entered into

by your respective parents, and it will be fulfilled on your arrival in Sonora."

"Are my wishes to be consulted in the matter?"

"You are expected to obey the wishes of your father."

"I desire to make an appeal to Señor Ruiz," said Julia, after a brief silence. "He knows that I can never love him because my affection has been given to another. He has the appearance and manner of a gentleman, and I can not believe it possible that he would willingly accept a wife who should be forced upon him. Let your heart speak, sir, and repudiate, as I do, a contract in which you have had no voice. Refuse to bind yourself to a wife who could never love you, and leave me free to return to my mother and the friends with whom alone I can be happy."

Don Augustin fidgeted, and looked perplexed and uneasy. He thought of the appeal of Wallace Wardner in the wine-shop, and felt that there was but one course for an honorable man to pursue; but he could not so easily throw off the shackles of interest and custom. He only muttered a few words concerning the duty of children to obey their parents, and his unwillingness to interfere in family arrangements.

"And you, my father," said Julia, turning to Señor Ribero; "can you really consent to sacrifice the happiness of your child? I feel that you are my father; but how can I respect and love you if you treat me harshly and unmercifully? I could wish to respect this padre; but I know that he and some others whom I might name have caused all the unhappiness of our family. You might have lived with my mother in peace and love, if they had not attempted to force her to their will. Not to your will, my father, but theirs; for your disposition was kind and gentle, only too easily bent to wrong purposes. She loves you still, in spite of all, and you may yet, if you love her, be happy with her and your child. Let us go to her, my father, and she will greet you, oh, so joyfully! We can be happy together in that free land, and you will not have to reproach yourself for forcing me to a fate that I dread above all things."

She ceased, and stood with arms outstretched and eyes streaming with tears, her look and attitude full of passionate entreaty.

Señor Ribero hesitated. His eyes were dim, and his face was flushed. His daughter had unsealed a long-forgotten fountain in his heart, and it needed but a light touch to send the waters gushing up. Father Ignatius noticed his agitation, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Be careful, my son," he said. "You must not give way to idle emotion. In the name of your best interests, I command you to be firm."

Julia dashed the hand from her father's arm.

"Who are you," she said, "who dares to interfere between a father and his child? Begone! and let his heart speak to my heart!"

"Audacious girl!" exclaimed the padre. "Do you presume to resist my authority? There is a way to punish such contumacy as yours."

As he spoke he seized her wrist with such a violent grasp, that a sharp cry of pain was extorted from her lips.

The next instant he was collared by Don Augustin, and was drawn back forcibly against the wall.

"What does this mean?" asked the padre, turning upon Don Augustin a face white with rage. "Are you crazy, young man?"

"It means that no cruelty shall be practiced upon Señorita Julia. Whatever may happen, I swear that not a hair of her head shall be hurt, and not a finger shall be laid upon her in anger."

Before the padre could recover from his astonishment, the ears of all were startled by a wild, shrill and terrible cry, that pierced the night-air like a shriek of doom. All—even those who had never heard it—knew it to be the war-cry of the savage Indians.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GAME OF 'POSSEM.

WALLACE WARDNER and his friends rode from Carovar's rancho through the darkness, following the road, which was easy to do, until daylight, when they halted, to examine the track and decide where they were.

Harvey Brinker was deputed to study the trail, and it took him but a short time to decide that they were on the track of the supposed Apaches and the litter.

This point settled, all seated themselves on the ground, to rest themselves and their horses, and to partake of a cold luncheon, as they had brought provision enough from El Paso to last them several days.

When the trail had been "spotted," any of them could follow it, and they trotted briskly over the road with which all of them were more or less familiar, until they came to a point where the tracks they were following diverged from the main road, turning off in the direction of the river.

"I reckon we won't go that way, boys," said Harvey Brinker, as Wallace was about to lead the party on the trail of the raiders.

"Why so?" asked Wallace.

"Wal, it won't do no harm to stop awhile and arguefy about it; 'cause those who may come arter us will think that we had talked it all over, and that we had made up our minds fur sartin when we started ahead."

"Who will come after us?"

"It's likely that somebody will. I should be apt to count on old Carovar bein' one on 'em."

"You are right in that. Well, Harvey, if you know all about it, tell us what we are to do."

"I don't putend to know all about it; but I do know jest whar those people have gone to. 'Thar's a leetle sort of a settlement over the river. It hain't been thar long, and it's likely that none of you fellers ever kem across it; but it's

thar, and old Harve knows all about it. When I saw it, I 'lowed it would be a good bait fur the 'Paches to bite at; but I reckon they hain't thought it wuth while, and it may be that old Carovar has got suthin' to do with the place."

"What sort of a settlement is it?"

"Scarcely any sort of a settlement. A few little houses, some of logs and some of adobes, kinder j'ined together, with a no-count mud wall around 'em. Thar's a good well of water thar, and the place used to be a big rancho; but the 'Paches played that out long ago. Part of the old house is standin' yet. It was a stout buildin' once."

"And you think, Harvey, that the people we have been following have gone there?"

"Hain't a doubt of it. Thar's no other place, or sign of a place, fur 'em to go to."

"Why should we not go there, too?"

"We all mean to, I reckon; but we needn't foller that trail. I've never yet see'd the time when I didn't think it was a good thing to kiver my trail, or to leave suthin' as a blind fur such as mought be follerin'. We'll go ahead, my boy, and cross the river a mile or so above here, and hide our hosses in an arroyo up thar. We've got plenty of time, as we don't want to git to that little settlement afore dark. Arter we've hid the hosses, and when dark comes on, we'll go down and take up our quarters in the ruins of the old house. Then we'll be like the mouse in the holler log, who bragged that he could see everybody, while nobody could see him."

Harvey Brinker's ideas were satisfactory to the party, and were immediately carried into effect. The river was crossed at the point he had designated, and the horses were allowed to graze until nightfall. Then they were tethered in the arroyo, and Harvey led the way to what he called the settlement.

It was situated on a gentle bluff near the river, and the most conspicuous object in the darkness was the ruined hacienda of which Brinker had spoken. This had once been the manor house—if such a phrase is applicable to the locality—of an extensive rancheria which had been ravaged by the Apaches and consequently deserted. After the lapse of

years the nucleus of another settlement had been established near the ruined building—a feeler, as it were, thrown out to test the cupidity and cruelty of the savages. There was no spirit of defiance about it, such as an American pioneer would have exhibited, establishing himself in an enemy's country, sheltering himself in a block-house and defending himself with his rifle. These people crept timidly forward, trusting their own insignificance and the forbearance of the Indians, against whom they had no thought of defending themselves.

It was in a lonely and exposed situation, an easy prey for the Apaches, who had thus far spared it for reasons of their own. In fact, they regarded that region as their preserve, or store-house, from which they could draw supplies as they needed them. They generously spared some miserable settlements, only visiting them occasionally to secure the cattle and horses, which they drove away without resistance, and leaving unmolested the wretched inhabitants, who held their precarious existence at the sufferance of their savage lords.

For this reason it might be that the Apaches had passed by the hamlet on their way to more southern and richer settlements; or it might be that the influence of Carovar had something to do with its exemption from ravage.

Led by Harvey Brinker, the party entered the ruined building, which was situated but a short distance from the "no-count mud wall" of which the old man had spoken.

The hacienda had been two stories in height, and the greater part of the lower story was still standing. The roof was gone, of course, and the interior was choked up with rubbish and weeds; but it afforded a good hiding-place, and it could easily be defended, as there was but one door, which could be blocked up without difficulty.

There was a corral near the wall of the settlement, in which there were a number of horses. When the party had settled themselves in the ruin, Andrew Crow asked permission to go and examine the corral, and Wallace allowed him to do so, under certain restrictions.

He came back with a smiling face, reporting that Bruce Wardner's horse was among those in the corral.

"Very well," replied Wallace. "That proves nothing."

"It's likely that Bruce is hyar, too, either alive or dead."

"That is no news. We must have some certainty on this point, and I am going to reconnoiter these premises. It is probable that we are outnumbered by Carovar's people and the others who may be here, and they would have us at a disadvantage if it should come to a tussle. We don't want to provoke a fight unless we are sure that there is something to fight for, and I must find out whether Bruce and the young lady are really here. Keep quiet, boys, and keep a watch, too. It may be that I shall need you to cover me with your rifles."

It was not to be supposed that the rifles of those in the ruin could be of much assistance to Wallace if he should get into difficulty, as the night was so dark that no objects could be distinguished at a rod's distance. The few buildings of the settlement merely rendered the darkness heavier in that direction, and not even their outline was discernible. All was silence within the low inclosure, and no lights were visible.

Wallace put fresh caps on his pistols, and loosened his heavy knife in its sheath, before proceeding on his reconnoitering expedition. He took his rifle in his hand, as he never moved without that indispensable companion.

He easily got over the "no-count wall," and advanced toward the buildings. They appeared to be a collection of low houses, mostly joined together, and forming three sides of an irregular square. In the middle of the square was a well, over which was a rude shelter.

Wallace went to the well, sheltered himself behind the structure that covered it, and looked about him. All was silent, and there was not a light to be seen, except through the partly-opened door of a room in the north end of a row of buildings.

He crept up toward this light, gently pushed open the door, and thrust his head in at the opening.

He saw, by the light of a candle on the floor, a man who was standing up and stretching himself, near a pile of loose straw, and the man's face was familiar to him, although a heavy bandage was wrapped around his head.

As Wallace entered, their eyes met, and the recognition was mutual.

"Wallace?"

"Have I found you, then, Bruce?"

"Shut that door, and come here."

Wallace closed the door, and turned to his brother again.

"I am glad to find you alive, Bruce. I was afraid they had killed you."

"I had a bad knock-down; but my wound is only a flesh wound, after all."

"As I have been mistaken for your ghost, I had reason to believe that you were dead."

"Don't speak so loud, Wallace. I am afraid you will break up my game."

"What game?"

"The game of 'possum. I have been playing 'possum here for a long time, hoping to get a chance to make my teeth meet in somebody's flesh, and I will do it yet."

"You must allow me to play out the game. How do you feel?"

"Well enough, but weak as a chicken. A little sore about the head, but hungry as a bear."

"Come with me, if you are strong enough to walk."

"Where are you going?"

"I want to get you into safe quarters, and then I will look after other matters."

"But, Wallace, the game that I have been playing—"

"Bother your game! I will play it out for you. Come."

As Bruce was not in condition to argue the question, he suffered his brother to take him away and lead him to the ruined building, where Wallace gave the password that had been agreed upon, and was admitted among his comrades.

The men were glad enough to meet Bruce, and Andrew Crow, in particular, was overjoyed; but Wallace, who had a plan of his own to carry out, put a stop to their congratulations, and requested his brother to instruct him, as speedily as possible, in the game of 'possum.

Bruce gave a brief sketch of his adventures since he had parted from Andrew, and spoke more at length of his experience in the room where Wallace had found him.

When he had finished speaking of Juanita, Wallace drew a long breath.

"That is my Juanita," he said. "It was old Carovar who carried her away, and she has suffered greatly, poor thing. Señora Carovar, I have no doubt, is the same woman who whispered to me at the fandango, telling me to ask Juanita of Maximo Carovar. It was for the best that you kept quiet, Bruce, as I will take up your game where you left it off, and will play it out. Take off your coat, now, and give it to me."

"What do you want my coat for?"

"Change with me, and don't bother. There is no time to be wasted. Here is mine."

When he had changed coats with Bruce, Wallace took the bandage from his brother's head, and made Andrew Crow tie it around his own head, tucking his long hair up under it.

"You must make the boys tie your head up with something else, Bruce," he said. "Here is my rifle. You have no gun, and I shan't need it while I am playing the game of 'possum. Jack Billings, you always carry more or less cord about you. Give me some."

The man addressed fumbled in the breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt, and produced a variety of cords and thongs, from which Wallace selected such as suited him. He then took a chip from a broken beam, and occupied a few minutes in whittling and in working with a cord.

"What are you doin' now?" asked Andrew

"I can't be sure what kind of work I may find to do, and I want to have my tools ready."

When he had arranged his "tools" to his satisfaction, he left the ruin, entered the inclosure, and went direct to the room from which he had taken Bruce. The door was still ajar, the light was still burning, and all was silent. He entered the room, and laid down on the straw.

CHAPTER XIII

GENUINE APACHES.

IF Wallace Wardner had been asked to give a definite reason for his action in returning to Bruce's room and lying down on the straw, he would not have been able to give it. He knew that he wanted to get away from "the boys" and do some quiet thinking; but he had nothing like a plan in his head. He thought that any one who should mistake him for a dead man or a helpless man might be forcibly convinced of the mistake. He thought, too, that various chances would be likely to present themselves; but he left his course to be decided by circumstances.

So he lay on his couch of straw, thinking of Juanita, and revolving plans for the punishment of Maximo Carovar.

The latter subject was uppermost in his mind, when he heard voices outside, and he listened intently. The voices were not familiar to him; but he was sure, from what was said, that one of the speakers was no less a personage than Maximo Carovar, who was about to pay him a visit.

Wallace saw his opportunity, and his blood was at fever heat in an instant; but he cooled himself down by a strong effort of will, and resolved to play out his part as he had begun it.

There was a slight hesitation in Carovar's manner as he entered the room; but he came in and closed the door after him. Wallace Wardner had never before seen him, but he had so often heard his person described, that he recognized the raving ranchero as soon as he peeped at him through the corner of one eye.

Carovar stood and gazed at the man who lay on the straw, and saw a handsome young fellow, with his head wrapped in a large white bandage, breathing lightly, and apparently in a state of stupor.

"And that is El Gallo?" he said. "How easy it would be

to strike a knife into his heart and make an end of him ! But I have another use for him, and must try to keep the life in him a while longer. The pretty Juanita will be mine now, beyond a chance, and the Ribero girl can be brought to reason, too. Those accursed fools at the rancho have lied to me. This is no deal man, and it is certain that he has not been out of the room."

Carovar came closer to the couch, and noticed the tray and the empty dishes.

"It seems that the fellow has been awake long enough to eat his supper," he said, "and his appetite must have been very good, to judge by the dishes he has cleaned out. And yet, I may be mistaken on that point. The door was left open, and some hungry dog may have slipped in and eaten the supper. I will examine his wound, and perhaps I will be able to rouse him."

He ~~was~~ able to rouse him. Wallace was lying on his back, with his eyes closed and his arms stretched out. As Carovar knelt and bent over him, the young man clasped his sinewy arms around the body of his foe, turned quickly, and threw him on the floor, flashing a heavy knife before his eyes.

This action was so sudden, that Carovar was too much astonished to offer any resistance, or even to make an outcry. It was not until he was fairly on his back that he attempted to struggle and to give the alarm, and then his antagonist had him at a great disadvantage.

"If you speak or move," said Wallace, "I will drive this knife through your throat !"

Carovar knew that the young man meant what he said, and he closed his eyes, and lay silent and motionless.

He saw it all now. This young Texan, beyond a doubt, was one of those who had bargained their souls to Satan, and marvelous powers had been given him. The major-domo was right. The devil-bargainer had appeared at the hacienda ; he had been lying in this room and absent from it at the same time ; he had been here and there and everywhere upon the wings of the wind, and all the while he had been waiting for an opportunity to get possession of Maximó Carovar and destroy him.

It is probable that the ranchero knew nothing in the shape

of a prayer—not even a pater noster or an ave Maria; but he thought of the names of a number of saints, of general and of local repute, and commended his soul to their care. As for his body, he was quite sure that nothing could rescue it from the power of this demon Texan, whom it would be useless to attempt to resist.

Maximo Carovar, therefore, lay quiet, and submitted to be bound hand and foot with the cords that Wallace Wardner had procured from Jack Billings.

When he had finished knotting the cords, Wallace set his adversary in a corner, and placed himself before him, brandishing his knife close to the face of the terrified ranchero.

"You know who I am," he said, tearing the bandage from his head, and throwing it on the floor. "You know that I was struck down by one of your tools, and that my head was cut open. Look! Do you see any sign of a wound?"

Carovar opened his eyes wide, as he stared at the young man's head, and perceived that there was not a scratch upon it. He would fain have crossed himself, as the best means of averting the influence of the demon; but his hands were tied, and he could only make the sign of the cross in the air by bobbing his nose this way and that.

"You know," continued Wallace, "whether you have done me an injury, and whether you have cause to dread my vengeance. I know that you carried away my Juanita, and that she is here. In which of these buildings or rooms is she concealed?"

Carovar's teeth chattered, as he in vain attempted to reply.

"Answer me truly, or I will kill you without a word."

"She is here, señor. Do not murder me, I beseech you. Before the most holy Virgin I protest that I have not harmed her. She is as pure as—"

"Devil! If I suppose any thing else to be possible, you would not be living now to speak of her. I will find her, and I will tell you how I mean to act. I shall place a man to guard you, with a pistol at your ear. Then I shall arouse my people, and demand that Juanita and the Señorita Ribero be brought to me. If they refuse, or resist, or show the least sign of treachery, you shall die that instant. In the

first place I will gag you, so that you will be sure to keep silence during my absence."

Wallace took from his pocket the chip that he had cut in the rain, and placed it in Carovar's mouth, so as to keep his jaws well apart, tying it behind his head.

He then left his adversary in the corner, and turned toward the door.

As he did so, he was startled by a piercing yell, which he at once recognized as the Apache war-whoop.

He had hardly got the door open when the inclosure was filled with savages, whose dark forms he could discern as they rushed hither and thither in pursuit of prey.

Yell followed yell, and shots and the breaking of doors were heard, mingled with the screams and shrieks of the terrified Mexicans, who could neither fight nor fly, and were struck down and scalped wherever they made their appearance.

Forgetful of the wrongs that had been done him by these men who were being butchered, and recognizing only the fact that a savage and inveterate foe was before him, Wallace sprung out at the door, and emptied all the chambers of his revolver into the bodies of the Apaches at close range.

At the same time the crack of rifles was heard, and the mountain-men, yelling as wildly as the savages, came pouring over the low wall into the inclosure.

Wallace, when he had emptied the last chamber of his revolver, was startled by the shriek of a woman. By the flash of a rifle near him, he caught sight of Julia Ribero, who was being borne away, struggling and screaming, by a stout Apache. Augustin Ruiz, weaponless and alone, was rushing to her rescue, when a savage grappled with him, and swung his war-club with the intent of dashing out the brains of the young Mexican.

Wallace had his knife ready in his hand, and he sprung toward the Apache. The first blow of the heavy bowie struck the savage in the back of the neck, and caused him to release his hold of Don Augustin, who profited by the opportunity to rush maddly away in pursuit of Julia Ribero.

Before Wallace could strike another blow, he was seized by the Apache, and both fell to the ground together in a

deadly struggle. They rolled over and over until the white man came uppermost, and he improved his opportunity by plunging his knife to the hilt in the body of his antagonist.

When he rose to his feet, the Apaches had all disappeared, and he was surrounded by friends, who eagerly inquired whether he had been wounded.

Lights were brought, and a survey was made of the field, which had been so dark that it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The Apaches had retreated hastily, without attempting to carry away their dead and wounded. They had expected, doubtless, to find there only the wretched inhabitants of the hamlet, who would have been an easy prey, and it had not entered into their calculations that they would have to meet the deadly rifles and the determined bravery of Texans and mountain-men. They had been so completely astonished by their reception, that they had left in a great hurry.

More than half of the Mexicans, including Carovar's troop and the people of the hamlet, had been slain and scalped; but nearly an equal number of the Apaches had perished under the fatal fire of the white men. The combat, all in the dark, had been close and deadly, and the inclosure looked like a slaughter-pen.

But there was no time to speculate concerning the affair, or to look after friends or foes. Bruce Wardner had quickly discovered that Julia Ribero was missing, and a search was instituted at once. Don Augustin came limping into the inclosure, and reported that she had been carried away by the Apaches. He had followed her into the midst of them as they were mounting their horses, and had been struck in the leg by a chance ball. The hurt was not a serious one; but it had been sufficient to disable him, and he only knew that she had been placed on a horse, and had been taken away by the Apaches, who had gone toward the north.

"Don Augustin, you are a gentleman," said Wallace, as he held out his hand to the young Mexican. "I must admit that I doubted it at one time; but I now acknowledge my error. You have shown yourself a brave and true man, and you are entitled to more credit than any of us."

Señor Ribero was discovered to have escaped unharmed; but padre Ignatius was among the slain. A few of Wallace Wardner's men had received slight injuries; but not one of them considered himself unfit for active duty. Don Augustin's wound was bound up, and he declared that it did not give him the least inconvenience.

Juanita was safe, and she gave padre Ignatius the credit of having received his death-blow while defending her from the savages. Wallace introduced her to his brother, as the wounded man concerning whom she had given herself so much anxiety, and hoped that she would have no further cause for uneasiness on his account.

Juanita blushed, declaring that she had already discovered her mistake, and that the matter was well understood between herself and Julia Ribero.

It had taken only a few minutes to sum up these facts; but it seemed to Bruce Wardner that just so much time had been wasted, and he insisted upon going at once in pursuit of the Apaches.

Wallace readily consented, but inquired, as the thought struck him, what he should do with his prisoner, Maximo Carovar.

This inquiry led to another, and he was obliged to give an account of the manner in which he had caught and caged the rascally ranchero.

It was the unanimous verdict of the mountain-men that Carovar deserved death, and that punishment should be at once meted out to him.

Wallace hesitated, and turned to Juanita, asking her if she approved the sentence.

As he spoke, Señora Carovar stepped forward, and Wallace recognized in her the woman in the black lace mantilla who had spoken to him at the fandango.

"Give him to me," she implored. "I ask his life."

"Give him to her," said Juanita. "She has been very kind to me and to Julia."

The heart of El Gallo was softened, and he consented, to use a legal phrase, to a stay of execution.

"Carovar shall be released," he said, "and he shall go with us. It may be that he can negotiate with the Apaches, and

that we can recover Miss Ribero without any serious difficulty. If he does the fair thing, he shall live."

He went to the door of the room in which he had left Carovar, and opened it, and saw at a glance that the question had been already settled. An Apache, attracted by the light, had slipped into the room during the *melée*, and had killed and scalped the helpless *ranchero*.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEADED OFF.

LEAVING Señora Carovar to mourn over the man who in spite of his faults, had been dear to her, and leaving the remaining Mexicans to care for their dead and wounded and to get away from that dangerous locality as soon as possible, Wallace Wardner and his friends hastened to set out in pursuit of the Apaches.

The Mexican horses in the corral had not been touched by the Indians, who had expected to pick them up at their leisure, and there were enough of them to mount the entire party. The Americans, however, preferred to go to the arroyo and get their own horses, as they considered them more reliable, and took from the corral enough to furnish mounts for Don Augustin and Señor Ribero, and for Juanita, who declared that she could stand the fatigue of the pursuit as well as the best of them.

Don Augustin had been supplied with arms, and was eager to ride after the Apaches. Señor Ribero had had nothing to say since the attack, scarcely replying when he was spoken to, but went moping about, with gloomy countenance and downcast eyes. The turn that affairs had taken had been far beyond his calculations. He could not help feeling that he was chiefly responsible for the loss of Julia, and that he would himself have fallen a victim to the Apaches, had it not been for the opportune presence of the Americans. Bruce Wardner asked him, very respectfully, if he would accom-

pany them on the pursuit, and he mechanically consented to do so, mounting the horse that was offered him, without saying more than he was absolutely obliged to say.

The night was still very dark; but Harvey Brinker easily led the party to the arroyo where they had left their horses, and they at once mounted and proceeded up the river, as it was known that the Apaches had gone toward the north, and there was no other route for them to pursue in that direction.

Bruce Wardner was impatient to get on rapidly, and endeavored to hurry his companions into a pace that would have been dangerous in the thick darkness and over such a road. For this he was taken to task by Harvey Brinker, who rode up to him, and took occasion to give him a little seasonable advice.

"It's gittin' late in the day, young man, fur you to be told that big haste often makes little speed; but it seems that you've forgot that fact. It would be an easy thing to lame our horses or break our necks on this yere trail, and that wouldn't help us a bit to ketch up with the 'Paches. Then ag'in, who knows but the cussed red-skins mought be settin' a trap fur us in some arroyo or bunch of timber, so's to give us lookins in the dark? We must go slow, I tell you, and look out fur sech tricks."

"While we are mopin' along at a snail's pace, the Apache are getting on as fast as they can, and they will be many miles ahead of us by morning."

"Don't let too high on that, my son. They've come from the north, and have had a long ride, and it stands to reason that thar horses must be a heap more tired than ours, which have had a party fair rest and feed. I know, and your brother knows, the very pint they are headin' fur. It's a pass in the mountains to the west'ard, and they've p'intedly got to go through that pass to reach thar own kentry. I know a trail, and thar's more of us knows it, that'll cut off full twenty mile of the distance atween us and the pass. We will take that trail, and by to-morrer night we will have the 'Paches headed off at the pass."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Bruce.

"Hain't a doubt of it. We will turn off from this track

arter awhile, and you will know more about it in the mornin'."

"But Miss Ribero has had a very long and hard journey, and she must be weary. The Apaches will push their horses, and she will suffer terribly."

"We can't help that, and she will be obliged to bear it as well as she can. We can do our best, and nothin' more is expected of anybody in this world. When we've done that we can leave the rest to the Lord."

Leave the rest to the Lord! Bruce Wardner had been trusting to his own strength, until he had almost forgotten that there was an overruling Providence, and it was brought back to his recollection by the words of a man from whom he would not have expected to hear the sacred name. He felt the rebuke, although none had been intended, and was silent.

So they rode on through the night, keeping scouts ahead to guard against Indian ambush, until Harvey Brinker announced that they had reached the point where they were to leave the river, and they turned off to the left, riding up the side of a bluff.

In the morning they found themselves on a high and dry table-land, and all felt fresher and in better spirits when the sun rose and lighted up the otherwise dreary landscape.

Wallace Wardner, who had resumed his own attire, looked gayer and more gallant than ever in his embroidered hunting-shirt. Juanita, who rode by his side, was a picture of happiness, and there could be no doubt in the minds of any who saw her, that she believed El Gallo to be handsomer and braver than all the rest of the party combined. Bruce Wardner looked wistful and anxious. He felt that he ought to trust in Providence, but wished that his friends would ride a little faster. Don Augustin rode near El Gallo, whose manner toward him was very friendly and respectful. The young Mexican had nothing to say concerning the position that he had lately occupied in regard to Julia Ribero. He now had the appearance of a man who knows his duty, and who is resolved to do it at all hazards. Señor Ribero continued silent and gloomy. The situation had no charms for him in any particular. He, like Bruce, was anxious to get

ahead. He felt that he had got Julia into this difficulty, and that he must do all he could to get her clear of it; but he did not see how he could now be otherwise than a loser, whatever turn events might take.

After noon they were among the hills, in a sterile, rocky country, and they continued to ride at an easy gait, having made but one brief stop, at noon, to rest and refresh their horses and themselves.

"We may have to push the horses arter a while," said Harvey Brinker, "and it won't do to take the speed out of 'em now. Our trail must be comin' tol'able cluss to that of the 'Paches, as nigh as I can calkerlate. If El Gallo, or any of the rest of you, should take a notion to ride up to the top of that hill yonder, I wouldn't be surprised if they mought see some sign of Injuns. Be keerful, boys, and don't show yourselves."

Wallace Wardner and another turned their horses and rode up the hill, a bare and rocky elevation, one of a range of such that stretched down from the mountains.

Just before they reached the summit, Wallace dismounted, gave his horse to his companion to hold, and ascended on foot, peering over the brow of the hill as cautiously as if he had been sure that an enemy was near.

He at once perceived that Harvey Brinker had not been mistaken in his calculations. In the distance, not two miles away, he saw a number of mounted men, slowly moving across the plain, and their course pointed nearly parallel with that which he and his friends had been pursuing.

He could only see that they were moving figures; but his practical judgment told him that they were Indians on horseback, and he hastened to inform his comrades of what he had seen.

"Jest as I 'spected," said Harvey Brinker. "Thar trail will run into our'n purty soon now, and we had better git on a little faster, so's to make a sure thing of bein' ahead of 'em."

A few miles further on, the old guide pointed out the pass in the mountain range that he proposed to reach. At the same time some of the men descried the Indians, who came out from behind a spur of the mountain, at the distance of

less than a mile from the whites, and but little further from the pass than they were.

The Apaches caught sight of their enemies as soon as they were themselves seen, and had no difficulty in divining their object. They pushed their horses to a run, hoping to be the first to reach the pass; but in this they were disappointed, as the white men had a slight advantage in distance, and a great advantage in the comparative freshness of their animals.

A brief but brisk gallop brought the white party to the pass, and they at once perceived that they had an almost impregnable position, where they could easily prevent their adversaries from gaining access to their own country. Their hope was that the Apaches, finding themselves cut off, would be willing to purchase a passage through the mountains by the surrender of their prisoner.

A plain trail led into the pass, which was a narrow opening through the mountains, hardly wide enough for two horsemen to ride abreast. The entrance was by a sort of canyon, with high walls, giving an excellent opportunity for defense, of which the white men were not slow to avail themselves.

Taking their horses a little way up the ravine, where grass and water were to be found, they left them in the care of a guard, and at once commenced to roll together some stones at the mouth of the canyon, to form a rude breast-work.

The Indians, who were angry enough at finding their retreat cut off, had halted on the plain, and a few of them rode forward, just out of rifle-range, and strove to annoy their adversaries by means of insulting gestures. Growing bolder, they came nearer to the pass, and stigmatized the white men as cowards and dogs, hurling at them all the opprobrious epithets they could think of. Some of the mountain-men became restive under this very inelegant abuse, and wished to try their rifles on the worst of the daring riders; but Harvey Brinker restrained them.

"If these red-skins git mad enough," he said, "they'll jest kill the gal or maybe do wuss, without carin' what may come afterwards. They're mad enough now, and we won't give

them any cause to git hotter. Let 'em sleep over it, and p'raps they'll be cooler in the mornin'."

The old man was right. Perceiving that they were not noticed, the Apaches became tired of venting their ill-humor upon silent adversaries, and soon returned to the main body. The night came and closed the scene, nothing being visible but the camp-fires of the hostile parties.

In the camp of the whites, it was arranged that three men were to stand guard until midnight, when their places were to be taken by three others. The three who were to have the first watch were Wallace Wardner, Andrew Crow and Jack Cillings. Of these, Wallace was to remain in the camp, while the others, mounted, were to patrol the plain in front of the canyon, to watch for any hostile demonstration on the part of the savages.

They kept watch until midnight, without being in any manner disturbed, and Wallace was about to wake Harvey Brinker, when his attention was attracted by a slight noise among the rocks at his right.

Looking in that direction, he saw a shadow thrown against a rock that was partially illuminated by the firelight. The shadow was that of a man's head—the head of an Indian, and Wallace knew that some daring Apache had climbed the rocks to reconnoiter the camp. He had instantly stopped when he had made a noise by dislodging a stone, and stood perfectly still. He could not be seen from the camp; but the tell tale shadow, of which he was not aware, gave his position quite accurately.

Wallace noiselessly secured his lariat, and awakened Harvey Brinker, to whom he pointed out the shadow.

"What do you mean to do about it?" asked the old man.

"We don't want to shoot if we can help it, or to raise any alarm. I think that I can get in a position to take him with my lariat. It will do no harm to try."

"Very well. I will watch with my rifle. If you miss him, you may be sure that I won't."

Wallace took his lariat, and silently crept toward the rocks, keeping the shadow in view, and carefully keeping out of sight of the proprietor of the shadow. Harvey Brinker remained where he was, with his rifle in his hands, intently

watching the shadow, ready to fire if Wallace's attempt should prove a failure.

The shadow did not stir, and there were a few moments of suspense. Then the old man saw the lariat leave the grasp of El Gallo, and fly in graceful circles through the air. If the Indian had been aware of his shadow, he could not have failed to see and avoid the rope. Harvey Brinker saw it, and watched the noose as it settled down over the head of the shadow.

Then there was an exclamation of astonishment and pain, and the old man sprung to his feet and hastily climbed over the rocks, while Wallace drew the lariat tight.

The rope had pinioned the Apache around the arms, just below the shoulders. The sudden strain and the shock of his fall upon the rocks had rendered him incapable of exertion for the moment; but he had succeeded in getting out his knife, and was attempting to cut the rope, when Brinker arrived and put a stop to his operations.

"That was a mortal good fling, my boy," said Brinker, when they had bound the Apache and brought him into the camp. "It's the first time I ever heerd of lariatin' a shadder. It was a good stroke of business, too, as we'll be apt to make suthin' out of this Injun."

"Do you know him?" asked Wallace.

"Yes. He's a big chief, and they call him Charmat. I don't know whether it's an Injun or a Mexican name; but that's the handle they give him."

The prisoner was made secure, and Wallace laid down to sleep, believing that he had gained a point.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SACRIFICE.

IN the morning the Apache camp was in commotion at an early hour, and a number of warriors were careering over the plain, endeavoring to provoke their adversaries by insulting gestures and epithets. Not succeeding in this, they brought forward Julia Ribero, and shook their weapons at her, and explained in pantomime what they would do unless the white men should get out of the way and leave them a clear passage to their own country.

This exhibition excited the indignation of the white men, and Bruce Wardner could hardly restrain himself from sending a bullet into one of Julia's persecutors; but it was known that the first hostile demonstration would be the signal for her death.

Forced to control themselves, the white men could only reply by bringing out their prisoner, and showing in pantomime what his fate would be in case Julia should come to harm.

This performance had a tranquilizing effect upon the Apaches, who returned to their camp, and appeared to be consulting together.

"We must open communication with them in some way," said Wallace, "and offer to exchange prisoners with them. It seems to me that they ought to accept such a proposition."

Don Augustin stepped forward, and offered to be the bearer of a flag of truce for that purpose.

"You had better think twice of it, señor," remarked Wallace. "These Indians have little respect for a flag of truce, and they might, if the humor should seize them, cut the throat of the bearer, without caring for consequences."

"It would be to their interest to respect the flag in this case," replied Don Augustin. "If it should really be a dangerous errand, you ought to let me go, as I can be better spared than any of you."

"That is a poor argument, Don Augustin, and you have already proved your value. We can't afford to throw you away."

"But I had intended a wrong to that young lady, and I desire to atone for it."

The entreaties of the Mexican were so pressing, that Wallace at last reluctantly consented that he should undertake the mission, and he was provided with a white rag tied on the end of a ramrod, a signal which the Apaches well understood, although they were not accustomed to respect it, except when it was to their interest to do so.

Having received his instructions, he rode forward until he was about half-way between the hostile camps, when he halted and waved his white rag. As this action provoked no response, he rode forward a little further, and again halted.

A tall and powerful Apache detached himself from his fellows, and rode to meet the Mexican. As he advanced, he threw his weapons upon the ground, and stretched out his arms. His example was followed by Don Augustin, who dismounted and held out his hand. The Indian also dismounted, and they met and talked together, apparently in the most friendly manner.

The interview was watched with the closest attention by the white men, especially when the Apache, seeming to become greatly excited, stepped around Don Augustin, and threw out his hands in wild gesticulations.

His gestures became more vehement, until he at last threw his arms around the Mexican, pinioning him in a close embrace, and fell with him to the ground.

The white men seized their rifles, and hastened toward the spot; but Don Augustin was tied, thrown on a horse, and on his way to the Apache camp, before they could get within range, and they could only return, grieving and fretting and cursing.

"That is just what I feared," said Wallace, "though I did not believe they would do such a trick while we have their chief in our power. I supposed they would be willing to act honorably for once, to save his life."

"Those Injuns are so durned mad," suggested Harvey

Brinker, "that they don't keer what happens. I don't like the looks of things a bit."

"I wish I had gone in place of that Mexican, as I would have been on my guard, and they would not have got hold of me so easily. I felt that I ought to go; but he begged so hard, and I thought that it would be a satisfaction to him. He has surprised and pleased me, by coming out so strong as a gentleman, and it hurts me to know that he has got into trouble. But we will gain nothing by fretting about it and the best thing we can do is to talk to this chief and get his opinion on the matter."

Harvey Brinker explained the situation of affairs to the prisoner, telling him of the treacherous conduct of his people, and asking him whether he believed that they intended to desert him, as he must know that they were placing his life in jeopardy by the action.

The chief was stolidly indifferent to all this, except that he seemed to enjoy the evident distress of his captors. He gave them to understand that his people would do what they thought best to do, without regard to his safety. If it should be to their interest to hold their white prisoners and to sacrifice him, he was ready to die. He would ask no help from his friends and no mercy from his enemies.

Nothing was done in the American camp during the day. Wallace Wardner had matured a plan in which there was a touch of desperation; but he believed that it offered the only chance of giving assistance to Julia and Don Augustin. He had explained it to "the boys," and, although it did not meet with favor from any of them, they were agreed that there was nothing else to do.

He proposed to mount the entire party, not even leaving a guard at the pass, and to steal upon the enemy at night, dividing into two squads, and attacking the Apache camp on two sides at once. Bruce was so excited, that he was ready for this or any other desperate plan, and was nervously anxious for the time to come when it could be carried into effect.

The Apaches, who were short of meat, sent out hunting parties during the day, knowing that their enemies would not dare to interfere with them. Although game was

scarce, they secured enough provisions to last them several days.

So the day passed, and night came, and preparations were made by El Gallo and his friends for their night attack.

Augustin Ruiz had been taken to the camp of the Apaches, who were delighted with the capture they had effected. They believed that they would be able to secure the release of their chief, and to compel the white men to open the pass through the mountains. They felt sure that their enemies would not dare to do any harm to Charmat, or to attack them in their camp. They held a council, at which it was determined that they would do nothing at present, but would wait for some movement on the part of the whites. In the mean time they occupied themselves in hunting, wishing to procure meat enough to last until they could reach the plains on the other side of the mountains.

Don Augustin was securely bound and left to his meditations, which were by no means pleasant.

It was not his capture that troubled him, as much as the fact that he had not been able to do any thing for Julia Ribero. In truth, he was afraid that his attempt and its failure would make her case worse than it had been before. He could not, and did not, expect that the Indians would spare his life; but he was grieved that it should be sacrificed uselessly. A great change had come over him since the attack of the Apaches, and since he had been freed from the influence of padre Ignatius. He was willing and anxious to prove the truth of the words of El Gallo, who had called him an honorable and chivalrous gentleman, and was ready to lay down his life for Julia, as some atonement for the wrong to which he had suffered himself to be made a party.

But he was not willing to die when his death could be of no possible benefit to her, and he resolved that he would not abandon hope, as long as he had the faintest chance of saving his life.

At night, after the prisoners had been fed, they were bound hand and foot, and were placed near each other, two guards being stationed at a little distance from them, and other sentries keeping watch over the camp.

Don Augustin submitted in silence to all that was done,

and made no motion until several hours of the night had passed, and the greater part of the Indians were buried in slumber.

He had remembered, during all the long hours since his capture, that he had a pen-knife in a watch-pocket of his calzoneros, and he meant to use it.

He got it out of the pocket without much difficulty, but tried in vain to hold it in such a manner as to cut his bonds, as his hands were tied at the wrists.

He then gradually crept nearer to Julia Ribero, without attracting the attention of the guards, and whispered to her, placing the knife in her hand, and showing her how to use it.

In a twinkling his bonds were cut, and he then performed the same service for her, cautioning her to remain quiet and to make no motion by which it might be known that her limbs were free.

"We have no time to make any explanations here," he said; "but I think there is a chance for you to escape. Your friends are yonder at the pass, and they have taken the chief of these Apaches, whom they hold as a prisoner. I came to endeavor to exchange him for you; but the Indians were treacherous, and I was captured. I am afraid that I did more harm than good, and must repair the damage if possible."

"If you can escape, I hope you will do so, and give yourself no farther trouble about me. I do not believe that the Indians will harm me; but they will be sure to murder you."

"I mean to make the attempt, and there is a chance for you, also, to escape. I will move away from you, and we will pretend to be asleep. Then I will start up and run toward the east. The Indians will pursue me, and their attention will be turned from you. Then you can slip away and run toward the light that you see shining from the pass. There will be a level plain before you, and you will only have to run straight toward the light. The darkness will help you to escape."

"But you, señor—what will become of you?"

"I am a good runner, and you need have no fears for me."

A good runner! The young Mexican knew that the Indians would easily overtake him, and that he must inevitably be recaptured or killed; but he had set his heart on sacrificing himself for Julia, and he held firmly to his purpose.

Julia had some suspicion of his intention, and began to beseech him not to carry it into effect; but he rolled away, and she was unable to speak to him.

Darkness and silence brooded over the plain when Don Augustin arose and slipped around the fire to the other side of the camp. He was clear of the sleeping men, when he was perceived by one of the outside sentries, who gave the alarm, and the camp was at once in commotion.

When the pursuit was fairly begun, and the attention of all the Apaches was turned to the east, Julia silently left the camp, and ran toward the light that gleamed brightly and hopefully in the west.

The yelling and shouting of the Indians told her that the pursuit of Don Augustin was being pressed vigorously, and then a wild and peculiar yell, followed by the cessation of all other noise, made it evident that he had been recaptured or killed.

In another moment the yelling recommenced, on a different key, and she knew that the Apaches were on her track. She ran at the top of her speed, but was soon so exhausted that she felt ready to drop.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

As has been said, the white men entirely deserted their camp at the pass, when they set out to make a night attack upon the Apaches. Juanita accompanied Ei Gallo as a matter of course, and she felt quite brave and adventurous, as she was armed with a revolver, and rode by the side of her lover. The Apache chief was bound on a horse, and compelled to ride with his captors.

They had no doubt of their ability to gain an easy victory over their enemies. Although it was probable that they were outnumbered by the Apaches, the superiority of their weapons and the unexpectedness of their attack would give them a decided advantage. There was only one difficulty; but that was a serious one. It was feared that the Apaches, finding themselves unable to repel their adversaries and retain their prisoners, would take revenge by immediately dispatching Julia and Don Augustin. This was a great risk to run; but no other plan could be suggested, and it was hoped that the surprise might be made so complete as to prevent the accomplishment of any such murderous design.

Wallace Wardner divided his party into two bands. One, headed by himself, was to attack the Apaches from the south side; the other, led by Harvey Brinker, was to attack from the north. Having agreed upon a plan of concerted action, the two bands left the camp together, and then divided, proceeding on their respective errands.

Wallace and his party had not gone far, when there was a great commotion in the Apache camp. The shooting and yelling that were borne to the ears of the white men plainly proved that the savages had been stirred up by some extraordinary event.

"Our friends have escaped!" exclaimed Bruce, as his brother stopped to listen. "One of them has got away, surely, and the Apaches are in pursuit. Let us ride on them now. We may be in time to save our friends."

The brothers seemed to have changed characters, Bruce being rash and impetuous, while Wallace was cool and cautious.

While the latter hesitated, doubtful whether it would be wise to attack without waiting for the other party, another yell was heard, which both brothers at once recognized as the scalp-hallo.

"One is dead!" exclaimed Bruce, almost frantically. "Come on, Wallace, or I will go at them alone!"

At this moment Juanita's quick ear heard a faint cry ahead, and her keen eye caught sight of something on the ground.

"Hark!" she said, laying her hand on El Gallo's arm.

"I am sure that I heard a woman's voice, and I believe that I saw the rustle of a woman's dress. Perhaps it is Julia!"

She did not wait for a reply, but gave her horse the rein, and he sprung forward like an arrow from the bow.

In a few minutes she came up to the object on the ground just as a half-naked Apache was about to aim a blow at it with his battle-ax. Her pistol was ready in her hand, and she instantly fired it at the Indian, striking him in the breast and stretching him backward on the ground.

Another Apache, who was just in the rear of the first, sent an arrow at her, that struck her horse and brought him down upon his knees. But Wallace and Bruce, with their men, were already at her side, and they made short work of the rest of the Apaches who had been pursuing Julia, while Juanita disengaged herself from her wounded steed.

Leaving Bruce and Juanita with Julia, Wallace and his companions dashed at full speed toward the Apache camp, yelling at the top of their voices. Answering yells from the other party showed that they were making a simultaneous attack, and soon both divisions met at the now deserted camp-fire.

The Apaches were so badly scattered, in pursuit of their escaped prisoners, that they could not be got together to repel this sudden assault, and the white men gained an easy victory. The plain was covered with flying Indians; but the darkness was so great that they could not be pursued effectually. As most of them were mounted, they escaped through the unguarded pass, glad to get away on any terms.

As Julia Ribero was known to be safe, all were anxious to know what had become of Don Augustin. Torches were lighted, and the plain was searched, and the body of the unfortunate young Mexican was at last found. It was covered with wounds, and the scalp was stripped from the head.

It rested with Julia to explain the manner in which Don Augustin had met his death, and she did not fail to give him full credit for the spirit of heroic self-sacrifice that had prompted him to give his life for her liberty.

"He was a gentleman," said Wallace Wardner, most emphatically, and there was not a man in the party who was not deeply affected by his death.

When inquiry was made for the Apache captive, he was discovered to be missing, and El Gallo wished to know what had become of him.

"I punished him for bad conduct, 'cordin' to the laws of war," said Harvey Brinker, who had been a soldier.

"How so?"

"Fact is, he wouldn't charge when I ordered a charge, and he looked so durned mutinous, and set sech a bad example to the command, that I was obleeged to send a bullet through his head."

Understanding the motive that had prompted, made no further inquiries, but gave directions up for the remainder of the night.

The morning the first business attended to was the body of Augustin Ruiz. A pile of stone placed on the grave, surmounted by a rude wooden cross, and he was left on "the field of his fame."

Finding the coast clear of Apaches, the party set out to return to El Paso, and in due course of time they reached that town, where all were well housed, and the girls were allowed the rest from fatigue and excitement which they so much needed.

Señor Ribero was silent and gloomy during the journey, and during his sojourn in El Paso. When he met Julia, after her escape from the Apaches, he burst into tears; but he did not offer to touch her, or even to speak to her, and soon relapsed into his former sad and dispirited condition. As Andrew Crow expressed it, he felt like a cat in a strange garret.

He knew that he had attempted a wrong, that he had been defeated in the attempt, and that his own life and Julia's would have been lost, but for the skill and bravery of those Texans whom he had hated so bitterly. He could not help feeling that he was despised by them and his daughter, and that he had no business among them.

Julia tried to convince him to the contrary, not by words, but by many kind and gentle actions, that were intended to show him that he was not disliked by her, and that she was solicitous concerning his welfare.

At last she begged him to let bygones be bygones, and to accompany her to Texas.

"Your mother will not wish to see me," he replied. "She will hate me worse than ever."

"She has never hated you," insisted Julia. "She will be rejoiced to see you, and you will find good friends with us, as well as a loving family."

The entreaties of Julia prevailed. The ice of years was melted, and Señor Ribero acted like a new man after he had consented to go with his daughter to Texas.

Before they went they witnessed the marriage of Wallace Wardner and Juanita. As Wallace felt that he could not leave his trading interests long enough to make a trip to Texas, he hastened to marry Juanita, in order that he might set Bruce a good example before he left.

Julia's predictions to her father were fully realized when she reached her home. Mrs. Ribero welcomed her husband most joyfully, and he found no one to reproach him. There was no difficulty in gaining his consent to the marriage of Julia, and he was so happy in the regained love of his family, that he was unwilling to return to Mexico even to dispose of his property there, and delegated that business to Wallace Wardner.

When Wallace had wound up the affairs of Señor Ribero, he disposed of his trading interests, and was finally content to settle down in Texas, at no great distance from his brother.

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